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THE WORKS OF
J. M. BARRIE

PETER PAN EDITION

VOLUME XII

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WITHDRAWN

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(John is muttering details of something in the M.S., I think of Maggie, who has been grievously expecting it — the chinese box)

Lady L. Has she made some blunder?

John I should think she had!

Maggie I'm so sorry!

Lady L. Don't scold her, Mr Shand. Poor little woman! (kisses L)

John (exists) Just listen! "In conclusion, Mr Speaker, these are the views on the unemployed of a man of the people who has fought the crisis fight with them and is now prepared to fight it for them. If the ministerial gentlemen answer me that the matter will be taken up this session in a Govt. bill then we part friends with no hard feelings but without their assurances I mean to go on alone. No question of embarrassing the Govt. will deter us, we can & prepared may have to wait on alone, but wait on it we will." Good heavens!

Maggie John, the machine just made that of being because it what you thought you speech meant.

John Nonsense! It is what my speech means, but of course at the end I have to hedge. If I defied them in that way they would have me among the party fought, and losing my seat in a month.

Maggie Oh! But I just thought you would like to see how it looks. There's the real peroration.

John Read it out.

Maggie "In conclusion, Mr Speaker, these are the views on the unemployed of a man of the people who has fought the crisis fight with them and is now prepared to fight it for them —

John You can't stick to my phrase as long as possible.

Maggie "... and is now prepared to fight it for them so long as he can do so without embarrassing the Government (she looks up)

John Yes, go on.

Maggie I call upon the Government not to take this matter up in a Bill of their own, and

WHAT EVERY WOMAN KNOWS

AND OTHER PLAYS

BY

J. M. BARRIE

LIBRARY ST. MARY'S COLLEGE

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
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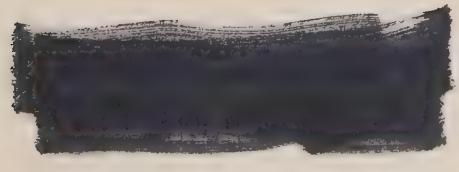

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
WHAT EVERY WOMAN KNOWS	3
ALICE SIT-BY-THE-FIRE	135
PANTALOON	245

WHAT EVERY WOMAN KNOWS

ACT I

James Wylie is about to make a move on the dambrod, and in the little Scotch room there is an awful silence befitting the occasion. James with his hand poised—for if he touches a piece he has to play it, Alick will see to that—raises his red head suddenly to read Alick's face. His father, who is Alick, is pretending to be in a panic lest James should make this move. James grins heartlessly, and his fingers are about to close on the 'man' when some instinct of self-preservation makes him peep once more. This time Alick is caught: the unholy ecstasy on his face tells as plan as porridge that he has been luring James to destruction. James glares; and, too late, his opponent is a simple old father again. James mops his head, sprawls in the manner most conducive to thought in the Wylie family, and, protruding his underlip, settles down to a reconsideration of the board. Alick blows out his cheeks, and a drop of water settles on the point of his nose.

You will find them thus any Saturday night (after family worship, which sends the servant to bed); and sometimes the pauses are so long that in the end they forget whose move it is.

It is not the room you would be shown into if you were calling socially on Miss Wylie. The drawing-

room for you, and Miss Wylie in a coloured merino to receive you; very likely she would exclaim, 'This is a pleasant surprise!' though she has seen you coming up the avenue and has just had time to whip the dustcloths off the chairs, and to warn Alick, David and James, that they had better not dare come in to see you before they have put on a dickey. Nor is this the room in which you would dine in solemn grandeur if invited to drop in and take pot-luck, which is how the Wylies invite, it being a family weakness to pretend that they sit down in the dining-room daily. It is the real living-room of the house, where Alick, who will never get used to fashionable ways, can take off his collar and sit happily in his stocking-soles, and James at times would do so also; but catch Maggie letting him.

There is one very fine chair, but, heavens, not for sitting on; just to give the room a social standing in an emergency. It sneers at the other chairs with an air of insolent superiority, like a haughty bride who has married into the house for money. Otherwise the furniture is homely; most of it has come from that smaller house where the Wylies began. There is the large and shiny chair which can be turned into a bed if you look the other way for a moment. James cannot sit on this chair without gradually sliding down it till he is lying luxuriously on the small of his back, his legs indicating, like the hands of a clock,

that it is ten past twelve; a position in which Maggie shudders to see him receiving company.

The other chairs are horse-hair, than which nothing is more comfortable if there be a good slit down the seat. The seats are heavily dented, because all the Wylie family sit down with a dump. The draught-board is on the edge of a large centre table, which also displays four books placed at equal distances from each other, one of them a Bible, and another the family album. If these were the only books they would not justify Maggie in calling this chamber the library, her dogged name for it; while David and James call it the west-room and Alick calls it 'the room,' which is to him the natural name for any apartment without a bed in it. There is a bookcase of pitch pine, which contains six hundred books, with glass doors to prevent your getting at them.

No one does try to get at the books, for the Wylies are not a reading family. They like you to gasp when you see so much literature gathered together in one prison-house, but they gasp themselves at the thought that there are persons, chiefly clergymen, who, having finished one book, coolly begin another. Nevertheless it was not all vainglory that made David buy this library: it was rather a mighty respect for education, as something that he has missed. This same feeling makes him take in the *Contemporary Review* and stand up to it like a man. Alick, who also has a re-

spect for education, tries to read the *Contemporary,* but becomes dispirited, and may be heard muttering over its pages, 'No, no use, no use, no,' and sometimes even 'Oh hell.' James has no respect for education; and Maggie is at present of an open mind.

They are Wylie and Sons of the local granite quarry, in which Alick was throughout his working days a mason. It is David who has raised them to this position; he climbed up himself step by step (and hewed the steps), and drew the others up after him. 'Wylie Brothers,' Alick would have had the firm called, but David said No, and James said No, and Maggie said No; first honour must be to their father; and Alick now likes it on the whole, though he often sighs at having to shave every day; and on some snell mornings he still creeps from his couch at four and even at two (thinking that his mallet and chisel are calling him), and begins to pull on his trousers, until the grandeur of them reminds him that he can go to bed again. Sometimes he cries a little, because there is no more work for him to do for ever and ever; and then Maggie gives him a spade (without telling David) or David gives him the logs to saw (without telling Maggie).

We have given James a longer time to make his move than our kind friends in front will give him, but in the meantime something has been happening. David has come in, wearing a black coat and his Sab-

bath boots, for he has been to a public meeting. David is nigh forty years of age, whiskered like his father and brother (Alick's whiskers being worn as a sort of cravat round the neck), and he has the too brisk manner of one who must arrive anywhere a little before any one else. The painter who did the three of them for fifteen pounds (you may observe the canvases on the walls) has caught this characteristic, perhaps accidentally, for David is almost stepping out of his frame, as if to hurry off somewhere; while Alick and James look as if they were pinned to the wall for life. All the six of them, men and pictures, however, have a family resemblance, like granite blocks from their own quarry. They are as Scotch as peat for instance, and they might exchange eyes without any neighbour noticing the difference, inquisitive little blue eyes that seem to be always totting up the price of things.

The dambrod players pay no attention to David, nor does he regard them. Dumping down on the sofa he removes his 'lastic sides, as his Sabbath boots are called, by pushing one foot against the other, gets into a pair of hand-sewn slippers, deposits the boots as according to rule in the ottoman, and crosses to the fire. There must be something on David's mind to-night, for he pays no attention to the game, neither gives advice (than which nothing is more maddening) nor exchanges a wink with Alick over the par-

lous condition of James's crown. You can hear the wag-at-the-wall clock in the lobby ticking. Then David lets himself go; it runs out of him like a hymn:

DAVID. Oh, let the solid ground
Not fail beneath my feet,
Before my life has found
What some have found so sweet.

(*This is not a soliloquy, but is offered as a definite statement. The players emerge from their game with difficulty.*)

ALICK (*with* JAMES'S *crown in his hand*). What's that you're saying, David?

DAVID (*like a public speaker explaining the situation in a few well-chosen words*). The thing I'm speaking about is Love.

JAMES (*keeping control of himself*). Do you stand there and say you're in love, David Wylie?

DAVID. Me; what would I do with the thing?

JAMES (*who is by no means without pluck*). I see no necessity for calling it a thing.

(*They are two bachelors who all their lives have been afraid of nothing but Woman.* DAVID *in his sportive days—which continue—has done roguish things with his arm when conducting a lady home under an umbrella from a soiree, and has both chuckled and been scared on thinking of it afterwards.* JAMES, *a commoner fellow*

altogether, has discussed the sex over a glass, but is too canny to be in the company of less than two young women at a time.)

DAVID (*derisively*). Oho, has she got you, James?

JAMES (*feeling the sting of it*). Nobody has got me.

DAVID. They'll catch you yet, lad.

JAMES. They'll never catch me. You've been nearer catched yourself.

ALICK. Yes, Kitty Menzies, David.

DAVID (*feeling himself under the umbrella*). It was a kind of a shave that.

ALICK (*who knows all that is to be known about women and can speak of them without a tremor*). It's a curious thing, but a man cannot help winking when he hears that one of his friends has been catched.

DAVID. That's so.

JAMES (*clinging to his manhood*). And fear of that wink is what has kept the two of us single men. And yet what's the glory of being single?

DAVID. There's no particular glory in it, but it's safe.

JAMES (*putting away his aspirations*). Yes, it's lonely, but it's safe. But who did you mean the poetry for, then?

DAVID. For Maggie, of course.

(*You don't know* DAVID *and* JAMES *till you know how they love their sister* MAGGIE.)

ALICK. I thought that.

DAVID (*coming to the second point of his statement about Love*). I saw her reading poetry and saying those words over to herself.

JAMES. She has such a poetical mind.

DAVID. Love. There's no doubt as that's what Maggie has set her heart on. And not merely love, but one of those grand noble loves; for though Maggie is undersized she has a passion for romance.

JAMES (*wandering miserably about the room*). It's terrible not to be able to give Maggie what her heart is set on.

(*The others never pay much attention to* JAMES, *though he is quite a smart figure in less important houses.*)

ALICK (*violently*). Those idiots of men.

DAVID. Father, did you tell her who had got the minister of Galashiels?

ALICK (*wagging his head sadly*). I had to tell her. And then I—I—bought her a sealskin muff, and I just slipped it into her hands and came away.

JAMES (*illustrating the sense of justice in the Wylie family*). Of course, to be fair to the man, he never pretended he wanted her.

DAVID. None of them wants her; that's what depresses her. I was thinking, father, I would buy her that gold watch and chain in Snibby's window. She hankers after it.

JAMES (*slapping his pocket*). You're too late, David; I've got them for her.

DAVID. It's ill done of the minister. Many a pound of steak has that man had in this house.

ALICK. You mind the slippers she worked for him?

JAMES. I mind them fine; she began them for William Cathro. She's getting on in years, too, though she looks so young.

ALICK. I never can make up my mind, David, whether her curls make her look younger or older.

DAVID (*determinedly*). Younger. Whisht! I hear her winding the clock. Mind, not a word about the minister to her, James. Don't even mention religion this day.

JAMES. Would it be like me to do such a thing?

DAVID. It would be very like you. And there's that other matter: say not a syllable about our having a reason for sitting up late to-night. When she says it's bed-time, just all pretend we're not sleepy.

ALICK. Exactly, and when—

(*Here* MAGGIE *enters, and all three are suddenly engrossed in the dambrod. We could describe* MAGGIE *at great length. But what is the use? What you really want to know is whether she was good-looking. No, she was not. Enter* MAGGIE, *who is not good-looking. When this is said, all is said. Enter* MAGGIE, *as it were, with*

her throat cut from ear to ear. She has a soft Scotch voice and a more resolute manner than is perhaps fitting to her plainness; and she stops short at sight of JAMES *sprawling unconsciously in the company chair.*)

MAGGIE. James, I wouldn't sit on the fine chair.

JAMES. I forgot again.

(*But he wishes she had spoken more sharply. Even profanation of the fine chair has not roused her. She takes up her knitting, and they all suspect that she knows what they have been talking about.*)

MAGGIE. You're late, David, it's nearly bed-time.

DAVID (*finding the subject a safe one*). I was kept late at the public meeting.

ALICK (*glad to get so far away from Galashiels*). Was it a good meeting?

DAVID. Fairish. (*With some heat*) That young John Shand *would* make a speech.

MAGGIE. John Shand? Is that the student Shand?

DAVID. The same. It's true he's a student at Glasgow University in the winter months, but in summer he's just the railway porter here; and I think it's very presumptuous of a young lad like that to make a speech when he hasn't a penny to bless himself with.

ALICK. The Shands were always an impudent family, and jealous. I suppose that's the reason they

haven't been on speaking terms with us this six years. Was it a good speech?

DAVID (*illustrating the family's generosity*). It was very fine; but he needn't have made fun of *me*.

MAGGIE (*losing a stitch*). He dared?

DAVID (*depressed*). You see I can *not* get started on a speech without saying things like 'In rising *for* to make a few remarks.'

JAMES. What's wrong with it?

DAVID. He mimicked me, and said, 'Will our worthy chairman come for to go for to answer my questions?' and so on; and they roared.

JAMES (*slapping his money pocket*). The sacket.

DAVID. I did feel bitterly, father, the want of education. (*Without knowing it, he has a beautiful way of pronouncing this noble word.*)

MAGGIE (*holding out a kind hand to him*). David.

ALICK. I've missed it sore, David. Even now I feel the want of it in the very marrow of me. I'm shamed to think I never gave you your chance. But when you were young I was so desperate poor, how could I do it, Maggie?

MAGGIE. It wasn't possible, father.

ALICK (*gazing at the book-shelves*). To be able to understand these books! To up with them one at a time and scrape them as clean as though they were a bowl of brose. Lads, it's not to riches, it's to scholarship that I make my humble bow.

JAMES (*who is good at bathos*). There's ten yards of them. And they were selected by the minister of Galashiels. He said—

DAVID (*quickly*). James.

JAMES. I mean—I mean—

MAGGIE (*calmly*). I suppose you mean what you say, James. I hear, David, that the minister of Galashiels is to be married on that Miss Turnbull.

DAVID (*on guard*). So they were saying.

ALICK. All I can say is she has made a poor bargain.

MAGGIE (*the damned*). I wonder at you, father. He's a very nice gentleman. I'm sure I hope he has chosen wisely.

JAMES. Not him.

MAGGIE (*getting near her tragedy*). How can you say that when you don't know her? I expect she is full of charm.

ALICK. Charm? It's the very word he used.

DAVID. Havering idiot.

ALICK. What *is* charm, exactly, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Oh, it's—it's a sort of bloom on a woman. If you have it, you don't need to have anything else; and if you don't have it, it doesn't much matter what else you have. Some women, the few, have charm for all; and most have charm for one. But some have charm for none.

(*Somehow she has stopped knitting. Her men-*

folk are very depressed. JAMES *brings his fist down on the table with a crash.*)

JAMES (*shouting*). I have a sister that has charm.

MAGGIE. No, James, you haven't.

JAMES (*rushing at her with the watch and chain*). Ha'e, Maggie.

(*She lets them lie in her lap.*)

DAVID. Maggie, would you like a silk?

MAGGIE. What could I do with a silk? (*With a gust of passion*) You might as well dress up a little brown hen.

(*They wriggle miserably.*)

JAMES (*stamping*). Bring him here to me.

MAGGIE. Bring whom, James?

JAMES. David, I would be obliged if you wouldn't kick me beneath the table.

MAGGIE (*rising*). Let's be practical; let's go to our beds.

(*This reminds them that they have a job on hand in which she is not to share.*)

DAVID (*slily*). I don't feel very sleepy yet.

ALICK. Nor me either.

JAMES. You've just taken the very words out of my mouth.

DAVID (*with unusual politeness*). Good-night to you, Maggie.

MAGGIE (*fixing the three of them*). *All* of you un-

sleepy, when, as is well known, ten o'clock is your regular bed-time?

JAMES. Yes, it's common knowledge that we go to our beds at ten. (*Chuckling*) That's what we're counting on.

MAGGIE. Counting on?

DAVID. You stupid whelp.

JAMES. What have *I* done?

MAGGIE (*folding her arms*). There's something up. You've got to tell me, David.

DAVID (*who knows when he is beaten*). Go out and watch, James.

MAGGIE. Watch?

(JAMES *takes himself off, armed, as* MAGGIE *notices, with a stick.*)

DAVID (*in his alert business way*). Maggie, there are burglars about.

MAGGIE. Burglars? (*She sits rigid, but she is not the kind to scream.*)

DAVID. We hadn't meant for to tell you till we nabbed them; but they've been in this room twice of late. We sat up last night waiting for them, and we're to sit up again to-night.

MAGGIE. The silver plate.

DAVID. It's all safe as yet. That makes us think that they were either frightened away these other times, or that they are coming back for to make a clean sweep.

MAGGIE. How did you get to know about this?

DAVID. It was on Tuesday that the polissman called at the quarry with a very queer story. He had seen a man climbing out at this window at ten past two.

MAGGIE. Did he chase him?

DAVID. It was so dark he lost sight of him at once.

ALICK. Tell her about the window.

DAVID. We've found out that the catch of the window has been pushed back by slipping the blade of a knife between the woodwork.

MAGGIE. David.

ALICK. The polissman said he was carrying a little carpet bag.

MAGGIE. The silver plate *is* gone.

DAVID. No, no. We were thinking that very likely he has bunches of keys in the bag.

MAGGIE. Or weapons.

DAVID. As for that, we have some pretty stout weapons ourselves in the umbrella stand. So, if you'll go to your bed, Maggie—

MAGGIE. Me? and my brothers in danger.

ALICK. There's just one of them.

MAGGIE. The polissman just saw one.

DAVID (*licking his palms*). I would be very pleased if there were three of them.

MAGGIE. I watch with you. I would be very pleased if there were four of them.

DAVID. And they say she has no charm!

(JAMES *returns on tiptoe as if the burglars were beneath the table. He signs to every one to breathe no more, and then whispers his news.*)

JAMES. He's there. I had no sooner gone out than I saw him sliding down the garden wall, close to the rhubarbs.

ALICK. What's he like?

JAMES. He's an ugly customer. That's all I could see. There was a little carpet bag in his hand.

DAVID. That's him.

JAMES. He slunk into the rhodydendrons, and he's there now, watching the window.

DAVID. We have him. Out with the light.

(*The room is beautified by a chandelier fitted for three gas jets, but with the advance of progress one of these has been removed and the incandescent light put in its place. This alone is lit.* ALICK *climbs a chair, pulls a little chain, and the room is now but vaguely lit by the fire. It plays fitfully on four sparkling faces.*)

MAGGIE. Do you think he saw you, James?

JAMES. I couldn't say, but in any case I was too clever for him. I looked up at the stars, and yawned loud at them as if I was tremendous sleepy.

(*There is a long pause during which they are lurking in the shadows. At last they hear some movement, and they steal like ghosts from the*

room. We see DAVID *turning out the lobby light; then the door closes and an empty room awaits the intruder with a shudder of expectancy. The window opens and shuts as softly as if this were a mother peering in to see whether her baby is asleep. Then the head of a man shows between the curtains. The remainder of him follows. He is carrying a little carpet bag. He stands irresolute; what puzzles him evidently is that the Wylies should have retired to rest without lifting that piece of coal off the fire. He opens the door and peeps into the lobby, listening to the wag-at-the-wall clock. All seems serene, and he turns on the light. We see him clearly now. He is* JOHN SHAND, *age twenty-one, boots muddy, as an indignant carpet can testify. He wears a shabby topcoat and a cockerty bonnet; otherwise he is in the well-worn corduroys of a railway porter. His movements, at first stealthy, become almost homely as he feels that he is secure. He opens the bag and takes out a bunch of keys, a small paper parcel, and a black implement that may be a burglar's jemmy. This cool customer examines the fire and piles on more coals. With the keys he opens the door of the bookcase, selects two large volumes, and brings them to the table. He takes off his topcoat and opens his parcel, which we now see*

contains sheets of foolscap paper. His next action shows that the 'jemmy' is really a ruler. He knows where the pen and ink are kept. He pulls the fine chair nearer to the table, sits on it, and proceeds to write, occasionally dotting the carpet with ink as he stabs the air with his pen. He is so occupied that he does not see the door opening, and the Wylie family staring at him. They are armed with sticks.)

ALICK (*at last*). When you're ready, John Shand. (JOHN *hints back, and then he has the grace to rise, dogged and expressionless.*)

JAMES (*like a railway porter*). Ticket, please.

DAVID. You can't think of anything clever for to go for to say now, John.

MAGGIE. I hope you find that chair comfortable, young man.

JOHN. I have no complaint to make against the chair.

ALICK (*who is really distressed*). A native of the town. The disgrace to your family! I feel pity for the Shands this night.

JOHN (*glowering*). I'll thank you, Mr. Wylie, not to pity my family.

JAMES. Canny, canny.

MAGGIE (*that sense of justice again*). I think you should let the young man explain. It mayn't be so bad as we thought.

DAVID. Explain away, my billie.

JOHN. Only the uneducated would need an explanation. I'm a student, (*with a little passion*) and I'm desperate for want of books. You have all I want here; no use to you but for display; well, I came here to study. I come twice weekly. (*Amazement of his hosts.*)

DAVID (*who is the first to recover*). By the window.

JOHN. Do you think a Shand would so far lower himself as to enter your door? Well, is it a case for the police?

JAMES. It is.

MAGGIE (*not so much out of the goodness of her heart as to patronise the Shands*). It seems to me it's a case for us all to go to our beds and leave the young man to study; but not on that chair. (*And she wheels the chair away from him.*)

JOHN. Thank you, Miss Maggie, but I couldn't be beholden to you.

JAMES. My opinion is that he's nobody, so out with him.

JOHN. Yes, out with me. And you'll be cheered to hear I'm likely to be a nobody for a long time to come.

DAVID (*who had been beginning to respect him*). Are you a poor scholar?

JOHN. On the contrary, I'm a brilliant scholar.

DAVID. It's siller, then?

JOHN (*glorified by experiences he has shared with many a gallant soul*). My first year at college I lived on a barrel of potatoes, and we had just a sofa-bed between two of us; when the one lay down the other had to get up. Do you think it was hardship? It was sublime. But this year I can't afford it. I'll have to stay on here, collecting the tickets of the illiterate, such as you, when I might be with Romulus and Remus among the stars.

JAMES (*summing up*). Havers.

DAVID (*in whose head some design is vaguely taking shape*). Whisht, James. I must say, young lad, I like your spirit. Now tell me, what's your professors' opinion of your future.

JOHN. They think me a young man of extraordinary promise.

DAVID. You have a name here for high moral character.

JOHN. And justly.

DAVID. Are you serious-minded?

JOHN. I never laughed in my life.

DAVID. Who do you sit under in Glasgow?

JOHN. Mr. Flemister of the Sauchiehall High.

DAVID. Are you a Sabbath-school teacher?

JOHN. I am.

DAVID. One more question. Are you promised?

JOHN. To a lady?

DAVID. Yes.

JOHN. I've never given one of them a single word of encouragement. I'm too much occupied thinking about my career.

DAVID. So. (*He reflects, and finally indicates by a jerk of the head that he wishes to talk with his father behind the door.*)

JAMES (*longingly*). Do you want me too?

(*But they go out without even answering him.*)

MAGGIE. I don't know what maggot they have in their heads, but sit down, young man, till they come back.

JOHN. My name's Mr. Shand, and till I'm called that I decline to sit down again in this house.

MAGGIE. Then I'm thinking, young sir, you'll have a weary wait.

(*While he waits you can see how pinched his face is. He is little more than a boy, and he seldom has enough to eat.* DAVID *and* ALICK *return presently, looking as sly as if they had been discussing some move on the dambrod, as indeed they have.*)

DAVID (*suddenly become genial*). Sit down, Mr. Shand, and pull in your chair. You'll have a thimbleful of something to keep the cold out? (*Briskly*) Glasses, Maggie.

(*She wonders, but gets glasses and decanter from the sideboard, which* JAMES *calls the chiffy.*

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DAVID *and* ALICK, *in the most friendly manner, also draw up to the table.*)

You're not a totaller, I hope?

JOHN (*guardedly*). I'm practically a totaller.

DAVID. So are we. How do you take it? Is there any hot water, Maggie?

JOHN. If I take it at all, and I haven't made up my mind yet, I'll take it cold.

DAVID. You'll take it hot, James?

JAMES (*also sitting at the table but completely befogged*). No, I—

DAVID (*decisively*). I think you'll take it hot, James.

JAMES (*sulking*). I'll take it hot.

DAVID. The kettle, Maggie.

(JAMES *has evidently to take it hot so that they can get at the business now on hand while* MAGGIE *goes kitchenward for the kettle.*)

ALICK. Now, David, quick, before she comes back.

DAVID. Mr. Shand, we have an offer to make you.

JOHN (*warningly*). No patronage.

ALICK. It's strictly a business affair.

DAVID. Leave it to me, father. It's this— (*But to his annoyance the suspicious* MAGGIE *has already returned with the kettle.*) Maggie, don't you see that you're not wanted?

MAGGIE (*sitting down by the fire and resuming her knitting*). I do, David.

DAVID. I have a proposition to put before Mr. Shand, and women are out of place in business transactions.

(*The needles continue to click.*)

ALICK (*sighing*). We'll have to let her bide, David.

DAVID (*sternly*). Woman. (*But even this does not budge her.*) Very well then, sit there, but don't interfere, mind. Mr. Shand, we're willing, the three of us, to lay out £300 on your education if—

JOHN. Take care.

DAVID (*slowly, which is not his wont*). On condition that five years from now, Maggie Wylie, if still unmarried, can claim to marry you, should such be her wish; the thing to be perfectly open on her side, but you to be strictly tied down.

JAMES (*enlightened*). So, so.

DAVID (*resuming his smart manner*). Now, what have you to say? Decide.

JOHN (*after a pause*). I regret to say—

MAGGIE. It doesn't matter what he regrets to say, because I decide against it. And I think it was very ill-done of you to make any such proposal.

DAVID (*without looking at her*). Quiet, Maggie.

JOHN (*looking at her*). I must say, Miss Maggie,

I don't see what reasons *you* can have for being so set against it.

MAGGIE. If you would grow a beard, Mr. Shand, the reasons wouldn't be quite so obvious.

JOHN. I'll never grow a beard.

MAGGIE. Then you're done for at the start.

ALICK. Come, come.

MAGGIE. Seeing I have refused the young man—

JOHN. Refused!

DAVID. That's no reason why we shouldn't have his friendly opinion. Your objections, Mr. Shand?

JOHN. Simply, it's a one-sided bargain. I admit I'm no catch at present; but what could a man of my abilities not soar to with three hundred pounds? Something far above what she could aspire to.

MAGGIE. Oh, indeed!

DAVID. The position is that without the three hundred you can't soar.

JOHN. You have me there.

MAGGIE. Yes, but—

ALICK. You see *you're* safeguarded, Maggie; you don't need to take him unless you like, but he has to take you.

JOHN. That's an unfair arrangement also.

MAGGIE. I wouldn't dream of it without that condition.

JOHN. Then you *are* thinking of it?

MAGGIE. Poof!

DAVID. It's a good arrangement for you, Mr. Shand. The chances are you'll never have to go on with it, for in all probability she'll marry soon.

JAMES. She's tremendous run after.

JOHN. Even if that's true, it's just keeping me in reserve in case she misses doing better.

DAVID (*relieved*). That's the situation in a nutshell.

JOHN. Another thing. Supposing I was to get fond of her?

ALICK (*wistfully*). It's very likely.

JOHN. Yes, and then suppose she was to give me the go-by?

DAVID. You have to risk that.

JOHN. Or take it the other way. Supposing as I got to know her I *could not* endure her?

DAVID (*suavely*). You have both to take risks.

JAMES (*less suavely*). What you need, John Shand, is a clout on the head.

JOHN. Three hundred pounds is no great sum.

DAVID. You can take it or leave it.

ALICK. No great sum for a student studying for the ministry!

JOHN. Do you think that with that amount of money I would stop short at being a minister?

DAVID. That's how I like to hear you speak. A young Scotsman of your ability let loose upon the world with £300, what could he not do? It's almost

appalling to think of; especially if he went among the English.

JOHN. What do you think, Miss Maggie?

MAGGIE (*who is knitting*). I have no thoughts on the subject either way.

JOHN (*after looking her over*). What's her age? She looks young, but they say it's the curls that does it.

DAVID (*rather happily*). She's one of those women who are eternally young.

JOHN. I can't take that for an answer.

DAVID. She's twenty-five.

JOHN. I'm just twenty-one.

JAMES. I read in a book that about four years' difference in the ages is the ideal thing. (*As usual he is disregarded.*)

DAVID. Well, Mr. Shand?

JOHN (*where is his mother?*). I'm willing if she's willing?

DAVID. Maggie?

MAGGIE. There can be no 'if' about it. It must be an offer.

JOHN. A Shand give a Wylie such a chance to humiliate him? Never.

MAGGIE. Then all is off.

DAVID. Come, come, Mr. Shand, it's just a form.

JOHN (*reluctantly*). Miss Maggie, will you?

MAGGIE (*doggedly*). Is it an offer?

JOHN (*dourly*). Yes.

MAGGIE (*rising*). Before I answer I want first to give you a chance of drawing back.

DAVID. Maggie.

MAGGIE (*bravely*). When they said that I have been run after they were misleading you. I'm without charm; nobody has ever been after me.

JOHN. Oho!

ALICK. They will be yet.

JOHN (*the innocent*). It shows at least that you haven't been after them.

(*His hosts exchange a self-conscious glance.*)

MAGGIE. One thing more; David said I'm twenty-five, I'm twenty-six.

JOHN. Aha!

MAGGIE. Now be practical. Do you withdraw from the bargain, or do you not?

JOHN (*on reflection*). It's a bargain.

MAGGIE. Then so be it.

DAVIL (*hurriedly*). And that's settled. Did you say you would take it hot, Mr. Shand?

JOHN. I think I'll take it neat.

(*The others decide to take it hot, and there is some careful business here with the toddy ladles.*)

ALICK. Here's to you, and your career.

JOHN. Thank you. To you, Miss Maggie. Had we not better draw up a legal document? Lawyer Crosbie could do it on the quiet.

DAVID. Should we do that, or should we just trust to one another's honour?

ALICK (*gallantly*). Let Maggie decide.

MAGGIE. I think we would better have a legal document.

DAVID. We'll have it drawn up to-morrow. I was thinking the best way would be for to pay the money in five yearly instalments.

JOHN. I was thinking, better bank the whole sum in my name at once.

ALICK. I think David's plan's the best.

JOHN. I think not. Of course if it's not convenient to you—

DAVID (*touched to the quick*). It's perfectly convenient. What do you say, Maggie?

MAGGIE. I agree with John.

DAVID (*with an odd feeling that Maggie is now on the other side*). Very well.

JOHN. Then as that's settled I think I'll be stepping. (*He is putting his papers back in the bag.*)

ALICK (*politely*). If you would like to sit on at your books—

JOHN. As I can come at any orra time now I think I'll be stepping. (MAGGIE *helps him into his topcoat.*)

MAGGIE. Have you a muffler, John?

JOHN. I have. (*He gets it from his pocket.*)

MAGGIE. You had better put it twice round. (*She does this for him.*)

DAVID. Well, good-night to you, Mr. Shand.

ALICK. And good luck.

JOHN. Thank you. The same to you. And I'll cry in at your office in the morning before the 6.20 is due.

DAVID. I'll have the document ready for you. (*There is the awkward pause that sometimes follows great events.*) I think, Maggie, you might see Mr. Shand to the door.

MAGGIE. Certainly. (JOHN *is going by the window.*) This way, John.

(*She takes him off by the more usual exit.*)

DAVID. He's a fine frank fellow; and you saw how cleverly he got the better of me about banking the money. (*As the heads of the conspirators come gleefully together*) I tell you, father, he has a grand business head.

ALICK. Lads, he's canny. He's cannier than any of us.

JAMES. Except maybe Maggie. He has no idea what a remarkable woman Maggie is.

ALICK. Best he shouldn't know. Men are nervous of remarkable women.

JAMES. She's a long time in coming back.

DAVID (*not quite comfortable*). It's a good sign. H'sh. What sort of a night is it, Maggie?

MAGGIE. It's a little blowy.

(*She gets a large dust-cloth which is lying folded on a shelf, and proceeds to spread it over the*

fine chair. The men exchange self-conscious glances.)

DAVID (*stretching himself*). Yes—well, well, oh yes. It's getting late. What is it with you, father?

ALICK. I'm ten forty-two.

JAMES. I'm ten-forty.

DAVID. Ten forty-two.

(*They wind up their watches.*)

MAGGIE. It's high time we were bedded. (*She puts her hands on their shoulders lovingly, which is the very thing they have been trying to avoid.*) You're very kind to me.

DAVID. Havers.

ALICK. Havers.

JAMES (*but this does not matter*). Havers.

MAGGIE (*a little dolefully*). I'm a sort of sorry for the young man, David.

DAVID. Not at all. You'll be the making of him. (*She lifts the two volumes.*) Are you taking the books to your bed, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Yes. I don't want him to know things I don't know myself.

(*She departs with the books; and* ALICK *and* DAVID, *the villains, now want to get away from each other.*)

ALICK. Yes—yes. Oh yes—ay, man—it is so—umpha. You'll lift the big coals off, David.

(*He wanders away to his spring mattress.* DAVID *removes the coals.*)

JAMES (*who would like to sit down and have an argy-bargy*). It's a most romantical affair. (*But he gets no answer.*) I wonder how it'll turn out? (*No answer.*) She's queer, Maggie. I wonder how some clever writers has never noticed how queer women are. It's my belief you could write a whole book about them. (DAVID *remains obdurate.*) It was very noble of her to tell him she's twenty-six. (*Muttering as he too wanders away.*) But I thought she was twenty-seven.

(DAVID *turns out the light.*)

ACT II

Six years have elapsed and John Shand's great hour has come. Perhaps his great hour really lies ahead of him, perhaps he had it six years ago; it often passes us by in the night with such a faint call that we don't even turn in our beds. But according to the trumpets this is John's great hour; it is the hour for which he has long been working with his coat off; and now the coat is on again (broadcloth but ill-fitting), for there is no more to do but await results. He is standing for Parliament, and this is election night.

As the scene discloses itself you get, so to speak, one of John Shand's posters in the face. Voe for Shand. Shand, Shand, Shand. Civil and Religious Liberty, Faith, Hope, Freedom. They are all fly-blown names for Shand. Have a placard about Shand, have a hundred placards about him, it is snowing Shand to-night in Glasgow; take the paste out of your eye, and you will see that we are in one of Shand's committee rooms. It has been a hairdresser's emporium, but Shand, Shand, Shand has swept through it like a wind, leaving nothing but the fixtures; why shave, why have your head doused in those basins when you can be brushed and scraped and washed up for ever by simply voting for Shand?

There are a few hard chairs for yelling Shand from, and then rushing away. There is an iron spiral staircase that once led to the ladies' hairdressing apartments, but now leads to more Shand, Shand, Shand. A glass door at the back opens on to the shop proper, screaming Civil and Religious Liberty, Shand, as it opens, and beyond is the street crammed with still more Shand pro and con. Men in every sort of garb rush in and out, up and down the stair, shouting the magic word. Then there is a lull, and down the stair comes Maggie Wylie, decidedly overdressed in blue velvet and (let us get this over) less good-looking than ever. She raises her hands to heaven, she spins round like a little teetotum. To her from the street, suffering from a determination of the word Shand to the mouth, rush Alick and David. Alick is thinner (being older), David is stouter (being older), and they are both in tweeds and silk hats.

MAGGIE. David—have they—is he? quick, quick!

DAVID. There's no news yet, no news. It's terrible.

(*The teetotum revolves more quickly.*)

ALICK. For God's sake, Maggie, sit down.

MAGGIE. I can't, I can't!

DAVID. Hold her down.

(*They press her into a chair;* JAMES *darts in, stouter also. His necktie has gone; he will never again be able to attend a funeral in that hat.*)

JAMES (*wildly*). John Shand's the man for you. John Shand's the man for you. John Shand's the man for you.

DAVID (*clutching him*). Have you heard anything?

JAMES. Not a word.

ALICK. Look at her.

DAVID. Maggie (*he goes on his knees beside her, pressing her to him in affectionate anxiety*). It was mad of him to dare.

MAGGIE. It was grand of him.

ALICK (*moving about distraught*). Insane ambition.

MAGGIE. Glorious ambition.

DAVID. Maggie, Maggie, my lamb, best be prepared for the worst.

MAGGIE (*husky*). I am prepared.

ALICK. Six weary years has she waited for this night.

MAGGIE. Six brave years has John toiled for this night.

JAMES. And you could have had him, Maggie, at the end of five. The document says five.

MAGGIE. Do you think I grudge not being married to him yet? Was I to hamper him till the fight was won?

DAVID (*with wrinkled brows*). But if it's lost?

(*She can't answer.*)

ALICK (*starting*). What's that?

(*The three listen at the door; the shouting dies down.*)

DAVID. They're terrible still; what can make them so still?

(JAMES *spirits himself away.* ALICK *and* DAVID *blanch to hear* MAGGIE *speaking softly as if to* JOHN.)

MAGGIE. Did you say you had lost, John? Of course you would lose the first time, dear John. Six years. Very well, we'll begin another six to-night. You'll win yet. (*Fiercely*) Never give in, John, never give in!

(*The roar of the multitude breaks out again and comes rolling nearer.*)

DAVID. I think he's coming.

(JAMES *is fired into the room like a squeezed onion.*)

JAMES. He's coming!

(*They may go on speaking, but through the clang outside none could hear. The populace seem to be trying to take the committee room by assault. Out of the scrimmage a man emerges dishevelled and bursts into the room, closing the door behind him. It is* JOHN SHAND *in a five-guinea suit, including the hat. There are other changes in him also, for he has been delving his way through loamy ground all those years. His*

right shoulder, which he used to raise to pound a path through the crowd, now remains permanently in that position. His mouth tends to close like a box. His eyes are tired, they need some one to pull the lids over them and send him to sleep for a week. But they are honest eyes still, and faithful, and could even light up his face at times with a smile, if the mouth would give a little help.)

JOHN (*clinging to a chair that he may not fly straight to heaven*). I'm in; I'm elected. Majority two hundred and forty-four; I'm John Shand, *M.P.*

(*The crowd have the news by this time and their roar breaks the door open.* JAMES *is off at once to tell them that he is to be Shand's brother-in-law. A teardrop clings to* ALICK'S *nose;* DAVID *hits out playfully at* JOHN, *and* JOHN *in an ecstasy returns the blow.*)

DAVID. Fling yourself at the door, father, and bar them out. Maggie, what keeps you so quiet now?

MAGGIE (*weak in her limbs*). You're sure you're in, John?

JOHN. Majority 244. I've beaten the baronet. I've done it, Maggie, and not a soul to help me; I've done it alone. (*His voice breaks; you could almost pick up the pieces.*) I'm as hoarse as a crow, and I have to address the Cowcaddens Club yet; David, pump some oxygen into me.

DAVID. Certainly, Mr. Shand. (*While he does it,* MAGGIE *is seeing visions.*)

ALICK. What are you doing, Maggie?

MAGGIE. This is the House of Commons, and I'm John, catching the Speaker's eye for the first time. Do you see a queer little old wifie sitting away up there in the Ladies' Gallery? That's me. Mr. Speaker, sir, I rise to make my historic maiden speech. I am no orator, sir; voice from Ladies' Gallery, 'Are you not, John? you'll soon let them see that'; cries of 'Silence, woman,' and general indignation. Mr. Speaker, sir, I stand here diffidently with my eyes on the Treasury Bench; voice from the Ladies' Gallery, 'And you'll soon have your coat-tails on it, John'; loud cries of 'Remove that little old wifie,' in which she is forcibly ejected, and the honourable gentleman resumes his seat in a torrent of admiring applause.

(ALICK *and* DAVID *waggle their proud heads.*)

JOHN (*tolerantly*). Maggie, Maggie.

MAGGIE. You're not angry with me, John?

JOHN. No, no.

MAGGIE. But you glowered.

JOHN. I was thinking of Sir Peregrine. Just because I beat him at the poll he took a shabby revenge; he congratulated me in French, a language I haven't taken the trouble to master.

MAGGIE (*becoming a little taller*). Would it help

you, John, if you were to marry a woman that could speak French?

DAVID (*quickly*). Not at all.

MAGGIE (*gloriously*). Mon cher Jean, laissez-moi parler le français, voulez-vous un interprète?

JOHN. Hullo!

MAGGIE. Je suis la sœur française de mes deux frères écossais.

DAVID (*worshipping her*). She's been learning French.

JOHN (*lightly*). Well done.

MAGGIE (*grandly*). They're arriving.

ALICK. Who?

MAGGIE. Our guests. This is London, and Mrs. John Shand is giving her first reception. (*Airily*) Have I told you, darling, who are coming to-night? There's that dear Sir Peregrine. (*To* ALICK) Sir Peregrine, this *is* a pleasure. Avez-vous . . . So sorry we beat you at the poll.

JOHN. I'm doubting the baronet would sit on you, Maggie.

MAGGIE. I've invited a lord to sit on the baronet. *Voilà!*

DAVID (*delighted*). You thing! You'll find the lords expensive.

MAGGIE. Just a little cheap lord. (JAMES *enters importantly.*) My dear Lord Cheap, this is kind of you.

(JAMES *hopes that* MAGGIE'S *reason is not unbalanced.*)

DAVID (*who really ought to have had education*). How de doo, Cheap?

JAMES (*bewildered*). Maggie—

MAGGIE. Yes, do call me Maggie.

ALICK (*grinning*). She's practising her first party, James. The swells are at the door.

JAMES (*heavily*). That's what I came to say. They *are* at the door.

JOHN. Who?

JAMES. The swells; in their motor. (*He gives* JOHN *three cards.*)

JOHN. 'Mr. Tenterden.'

DAVID. Him that was speaking for you?

JOHN. The same. He's a whip and an Honourable. 'Lady Sybil Tenterden.' (*Frowns.*) Her! She's his sister.

MAGGIE. A married woman?

JOHN. No. 'The Comtesse de la Brière.'

MAGGIE (*the scholar*). She must be French.

JOHN. Yes; I think she's some relation. She's a widow.

JAMES. But what am I to say to them? (*'Mr. Shand's compliments, and he will be proud to receive them' is the very least that the Wylies expect.*)

JOHN (*who was evidently made for great ends*).

Say I'm very busy, but if they care to wait I hope presently to give them a few minutes.

JAMES (*thunderstruck*). Good God, Mr. Shand!

(*But it makes him* JOHN'S *more humble servant than ever, and he departs with the message.*)

JOHN (*not unaware of the sensation he has created*). I'll go up and let the crowd see me from the window.

MAGGIE. But—but—what are we to do with these ladies?

JOHN (*as he tramps upwards*). It's your reception, Maggie; this will prove you.

MAGGIE (*growing smaller*). Tell me what you know about this Lady Sybil?

JOHN. The only thing I know about her is that she thinks me vulgar.

MAGGIE. You?

JOHN. She has attended some of my meetings, and I'm told she said that.

MAGGIE. What could the woman mean?

JOHN. I wonder. When I come down I'll ask her.

(*With his departure* MAGGIE'S *nervousness increases.*)

ALICK (*encouragingly*). In at them, Maggie, with your French.

MAGGIE. It's all slipping from me, father.

DAVID (*gloomily*). I'm sure to say 'for to come for to go.'

(*The newcomers glorify the room, and* MAGGIE *feels that they have lifted her up with the tongs and deposited her in one of the basins. They are far from intending to be rude; it is not their fault that thus do swans scatter the ducks. They do not know that they are guests of the family, they think merely that they are waiting with other strangers in a public room; they undulate inquiringly, and if* MAGGIE *could undulate in return she would have no cause for offence. But she suddenly realises that this is an art as yet denied her, and that though* DAVID *might buy her evening-gowns as fine as theirs* (*and is at this moment probably deciding to do so*), *she would look better carrying them in her arms than on her person. She also feels that to emerge from wraps as they are doing is more difficult than to plank your money on the counter for them. The* COMTESSE *she could forgive, for she is old; but* LADY SYBIL *is young and beautiful and comes lazily to rest like a stately ship of Tarsus.*)

COMTESSE (*smiling divinely, and speaking with such a pretty accent*). I hope one is not in the way. We were told we might wait.

MAGGIE (*bravely climbing out of the basin*). Certainly—I am sure—if you will be so—it is—

(*She knows that* DAVID *and her father are very sorry for her.*)

(*A high voice is heard orating outside.*)

SYBIL (*screwing her nose deliciously*). He is at it again, auntie.

COMTESSE. Mon Dieu! (*Like one begging pardon of the universe*) It is Mr. Tenterden, you understand, making one more of his delightful speeches to the crowd. *Would* you be so charming as to shut the door?

(*This to* DAVID *in such appeal that she is evidently making the petition of her life.* DAVID *saves her.*)

MAGGIE (*determined not to go under*). J'espère que vous—trouvez—cette—réunion—intéressante?

COMTESSE. Vous parlez français? Mais c'est charmant! Voyons, causons un peu. Racontez-moi tout de ce grand homme, toutes les choses merveilleuses qu'il a faites.

MAGGIE. I—I—Je connais— (*Alas!*)

COMTESSE (*naughtily*). Forgive me, mademoiselle, I thought you spoke French.

SYBIL (*who knows that* DAVID *admires her shoulders*). How wicked of you, auntie. (*To* MAGGIE) I assure you none of us can understand her when she gallops at that pace.

MAGGIE (*crushed*). It doesn't matter. I will tell Mr. Shand that you are here.

SYBIL (*drawling*). Please don't trouble him. We

are really only waiting till my brother recovers and can take us back to our hotel.

MAGGIE. I'll tell him.

(*She is glad to disappear up the stair.*)

COMTESSE. The lady seems distressed. Is she a relation of Mr. Shand?

DAVID. Not for to say a relation. She's my sister. Our name is Wylie.

(*But granite quarries are nothing to them.*)

COMTESSE. How do you do? You are the committee man of Mr. Shand?

DAVID. No, just friends.

COMTESSE (*gaily to the basins*). Aha! I know you. Next, please! Sybil, do you weigh yourself, or are you asleep?

(LADY SYBIL *has sunk indolently into a weighing-chair.*)

SYBIL. Not quite, auntie.

COMTESSE (*the mirror of la politesse*). Tell me all about Mr. Shand. Was it here that he—picked up the pin?

DAVID. The pin?

COMTESSE. As *I* have read, a self-made man always begins by picking up a pin. After that, as the memoirs say, his rise was rapid.

(DAVID, *however, is once more master of himself, and indeed has begun to tot up the cost of their garments.*)

DAVID. It wasn't a pin he picked up, my lady; it was £300.

ALICK (*who feels that* JOHN'S *greatness has been outside the conversation quite long enough*). And his rise wasn't so rapid, just at first, David!

DAVID. He had his fight. His original intention was to become a minister; he's university-educated, you know; he's not a working-man member.

ALICK (*with reverence*). He's an M.A. But while he was a student he got a place in an iron-cementer's business.

COMTESSE (*now far out of her depths*). Iron-cementer?

DAVID. They scrape boilers.

COMTESSE. I see. The fun men have, Sybil!

DAVID (*with some solemnity*). There have been millions made in scraping boilers. They say, father, he went into business so as to be able to pay off the £300.

ALICK (*slily*). So I've heard.

COMTESSE. Aha—it was a loan?

(DAVID *and* ALICK *are astride their great subject now.*)

DAVID. No, a gift—of a sort—from some well-wishers. But they wouldn't hear of his paying it off, father!

ALICK. Not them!

COMTESSE (*restraining an impulse to think of other things*). That was kind, charming.

ALICK (*with a look at David*). Yes. Well, my lady, he developed a perfect genius for the iron-cementing.

DAVID. But his ambition wasn't satisfied. Soon he had public life in his eye. As a heckler he was something fearsome; they had to seat him on the platform for to keep him quiet. Next they had to let him into the Chair. After that he did all the speaking; he cleared all roads before him like a fire-engine; and when this vacancy occurred, you could hardly say it did occur, so quickly did he step into it. My lady, there are few more impressive sights in the world than a Scotsman on the make.

COMTESSE. I can well believe it. And now he has said farewell to boilers?

DAVID (*impressively*). Not at all; the firm promised if he was elected for to make him their London manager at £800 a year.

COMTESSE. There is a strong man for you, Sybil; but I believe you *are* asleep.

SYBIL (*stirring herself*). Honestly I'm not. (*Sweetly to the others*) But *would* you mind finding out whether my brother is drawing to a close?

(DAVID *goes out, leaving poor* ALICK *marooned. The* COMTESSE *is kind to him.*)

COMTESSE. Thank you very much. (*Which helps*

ALICK *out*). Don't you love a strong man, sleepy head?

SYBIL (*preening herself*). I never met one.

COMTESSE. Neither have I. But if you *did* meet one, would he wake you up?

SYBIL. I dare say he would find there were two of us.

COMTESSE (*considering her*). Yes, I think he would. Ever been in love, you cold thing?

SYBIL (*yawning*). I have never shot up in flame, auntie.

COMTESSE. Think you could manage it?

SYBIL. If Mr. Right came along.

COMTESSE. As a girl of to-day it would be your duty to tame him.

SYBIL. As a girl of to-day I would try to do my duty.

COMTESSE. And if it turned out that *he* tamed you instead?

SYBIL. He would have to do that if he were *my* Mr. Right.

COMTESSE. And then?

SYBIL. Then, of course, I should adore him. Auntie, I think if I ever really love it will be like Mary Queen of Scots, who said of her Bothwell that she could follow him round the world in her nighty.

COMTESSE. My petite!

SYBIL. I believe I mean it.

COMTESSE. Oh, it is quite my conception of your character. Do you know, I am rather sorry for this Mr. John Shand.

SYBIL (*opening her fine eyes*). Why? He is quite a boor, is he not?

COMTESSE. For that very reason. Because his great hour is already nearly sped. That wild bull manner that moves the multitude—they will laugh at it in your House of Commons.

SYBIL (*indifferent*). I suppose so.

COMTESSE. Yet if he had education—

SYBIL. Have we not been hearing how superbly he is educated?

COMTESSE. It is such as you or me that he needs to educate him now. *You* could do it almost too well.

SYBIL (*with that pretty stretch of neck*). I am not sufficiently interested. I retire in your favour. How would you begin?

COMTESSE. By asking him to drop in, about five, of course. By the way, I wonder is there a Mrs. Shand?

SYBIL. I have no idea. But they marry young.

COMTESSE. If there is not, there is probably a lady waiting for him, somewhere in a boiler.

SYBIL. I dare say.

(MAGGIE *descends.*)

MAGGIE. Mr. Shand will be down directly.

COMTESSE. Thank you. Your brother has been

giving us such an interesting account of his career. I forget, Sybil, whether he said that he was married.

MAGGIE. No, he's not married; but he will be soon.

COMTESSE. Ah! (*She is merely making conversation.*) A friend of yours?

MAGGIE (*now a scorner of herself*). I don't think much of her.

COMTESSE. In that case, tell me all about her.

MAGGIE. There's not much to tell. She's common, and stupid. One of those who go in for self-culture; and then when the test comes they break down. (*With sinister enjoyment*) She'll be the ruin of him.

COMTESSE. But is not that sad! Figure to yourself how many men with greatness before them have been shipwrecked by marrying in the rank from which they sprang.

MAGGIE. I've told her that.

COMTESSE. But she will not give him up?

MAGGIE. No.

SYBIL. Why should she if he cares for her? What is her name?

MAGGIE. It's—Maggie.

COMTESSE (*still uninterested*). Well, I am afraid that Maggie is to do for John. (JOHN *comes down.*) Ah, our hero!

JOHN. Sorry I have kept you waiting. The Comtesse?

COMTESSE. And my niece, Lady Sybil Tenterden. (SYBIL'S *head inclines on its stem.*) She is not really all my niece; I mean I am only half of her aunt. What a triumph, Mr. Shand!

JOHN. Oh, pretty fair, pretty fair. Your brother has just finished addressing the crowd, Lady Sybil.

SYBIL. Then we must not detain Mr. Shand, auntie.

COMTESSE (*who unless her heart is touched thinks insincerity charming*). Only one word. I heard you speak last night. Sublime! Just the sort of impassioned eloquence that your House of Commons loves.

JOHN. It's very good of you to say so.

COMTESSE. But we must run. *Bon soir.*

(SYBIL *bows as to some one far away.*)

JOHN. Good-night, Lady Sybil. I hear you think I'm vulgar.

(*Eyebrows are raised.*)

COMTESSE. My dear Mr. Shand, what absurd—

JOHN. I was told she said that after hearing me speak.

COMTESSE. Quite a mistake, I—

JOHN (*doggedly*). Is it not true?

SYBIL (*'waking up'*). You seem to know, Mr. Shand; and as you press me so unnecessarily—well, yes, that is how you struck me.

COMTESSE. My child!

SYBIL (*who is a little agitated*). He would have it.

JOHN (*perplexed*). What's the matter? I just wanted to know, because if it's true I must alter it.

COMTESSE. There, Sybil, see how he values your good opinion.

SYBIL (*her svelte figure giving like a fishing-rod*). It is very nice of you to put it in that way, Mr. Shand. Forgive me.

JOHN. But I don't quite understand yet. Of course, it can't matter to me, Lady Sybil, what you think of me; what I mean is, that I mustn't be vulgar if it would be injurious to my career.

(*The fishing-rod regains its rigidity.*)

SYBIL. I see. No, of course, I could not affect your career, Mr. Shand.

JOHN (*who quite understands that he is being challenged*). That's so, Lady Sybil, meaning no offence.

SYBIL (*who has a naughty little impediment in her voice when she is most alluring*). Of course not. And we are friends again?

JOHN. Certainly.

SYBIL. Then I hope you will come to see me in London as I present no terrors.

JOHN (*he is a man, is* JOHN). I'll be very pleased.

SYBIL. Any afternoon about five.

JOHN. Much obliged. And you can teach me the things I don't know yet, if you'll be so kind.

SYBIL (*the impediment becoming more assertive*). If you wish it, I shall do my best.

JOHN. Thank you, Lady Sybil. And who knows there may be one or two things I can teach you.

SYBIL (*it has now become an angel's hiccough*). Yes, we can help one another. Good-bye till then.

JOHN. Good-bye. Maggie, the ladies are going.

(*During this skirmish* MAGGIE *has stood apart. At the mention of her name they glance at one another.* JOHN *escorts* SYBIL, *but the* COMTESSE *turns back.*)

COMTESSE. Are you, then, *the* Maggie? (MAGGIE *nods rather defiantly and the* COMTESSE *is distressed.*) But if I had known I would not have said those things. Please forgive an old woman.

MAGGIE. It doesn't matter.

COMTESSE. I—I dare say it will be all right. Mademoiselle, if I were you I would not encourage those *tête-à-têtes* with Lady Sybil. I am the rude one, but she is the dangerous one; and I am afraid his impudence has attracted her. *Bon voyage,* Miss Maggie.

MAGGIE. Good-bye—but I *can* speak French. Je parle français. Isn't that right?

COMTESSE. But yes, it is excellent. (*Making things easy for her*) C'est très bien.

MAGGIE. Je me suis embrouillée—la dernière fois.

COMTESSE. Good! Shall I speak more slowly?

MAGGIE. No, no. Non, non, faster, faster.

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COMTESSE. J'admire votre courage!

MAGGIE. Je comprends chaque mot.

COMTESSE. Parfait! Bravo!

MAGGIE. Voilà!

COMTESSE. Superbe!

(*She goes, applauding; and* MAGGIE *has a moment of elation, which however has passed before* JOHN *returns for his hat.*)

MAGGIE. Have you more speaking to do, John?

(*He is somehow in high good-humour.*)

JOHN. I must run across and address the Cowcaddens Club. (*He sprays his throat with a hand-spray.*) I wonder if I *am* vulgar, Maggie?

MAGGIE. You are not, but *I* am.

JOHN. Not that *I* can see.

MAGGIE. Look how overdressed I am, John! I knew it was too showy when I ordered it, and yet I could not resist the thing. But I will tone down, I will. What do you think of Lady Sybil?

JOHN. That young woman had better be careful. She's a bit of a besom, Maggie.

MAGGIE. She's beautiful, John.

JOHN. She has a neat way of stretching herself. For playing with she would do as well as another.

(*She looks at him wistfully.*)

MAGGIE. You couldn't stay and have a talk for a few minutes?

JOHN. If you want me, Maggie. The longer you

keep them waiting, the more they think of you.

MAGGIE. When are you to announce that we're to be married, John?

JOHN. I won't be long. You've waited a year more than you need have done, so I think it's your due I should hurry things now.

MAGGIE. I think it's noble of you.

JOHN. Not at all, Maggie; the nobleness has been yours in waiting so patiently. And your brothers would insist on it at any rate. They're watching me like cats with a mouse.

MAGGIE. It's so little I've done to help.

JOHN. Three hundred pounds.

MAGGIE. I'm getting a thousand per cent. for it.

JOHN. And very pleased I am you should think so, Maggie.

MAGGIE. Is it terrible hard to you, John?

JOHN. It's not hard at all. I can say truthfully, Maggie, that all, or nearly all, I've seen of you in these six years has gone to increase my respect for you.

MAGGIE. Respect!

JOHN. And a bargain's a bargain.

MAGGIE. If it wasn't that you're so glorious to me, John, I would let you off.

(*There is a gleam in his eye, but he puts it out.*)

JOHN. In my opinion, Maggie, we'll be a very happy pair.

(*She accepts this eagerly.*)

MAGGIE. We know each other so well, John, don't we?

JOHN. I'm an extraordinary queer character, and I suppose nobody knows me well except myself; but I know you, Maggie, to the very roots of you.

(*She magnanimously lets this remark alone.*)

MAGGIE. And it's not as if there was any other woman you—fancied more, John.

JOHN. There's none whatever.

MAGGIE. If there ever should be—oh, if there ever should be! Some woman with charm.

JOHN. Maggie, you forget yourself. There couldn't be another woman once I was a married man.

MAGGIE. One has heard of such things.

JOHN. Not in Scotsmen, Maggie; not in Scotsmen.

MAGGIE. I've sometimes thought, John, that the difference between us and the English is that the Scotch are hard in all other respects but soft with women, and the English are hard with women but soft in all other respects.

JOHN. You've forgotten the grandest moral attribute of a Scotsman, Maggie, that he'll do nothing which might damage his career.

MAGGIE. Ah, but John, whatever you do, you do it so tremendously; and if you were to love, what a passion it would be.

JOHN. There's something in that, I suppose.

MAGGIE. And then, what could I do? For the desire of my life now, John, is to help you to get everything you want, except just that I want you to have me, too.

JOHN. We'll get on fine, Maggie.

MAGGIE. You're just making the best of it. They say that love is sympathy, and if that's so, mine must be a great love for you, for I see all you are feeling this night and bravely hiding; I feel for you as if I was John Shand myself. (*He sighs.*)

JOHN. I had best go to the meeting, Maggie.

MAGGIE. Not yet. Can you look me in the face, John, and deny that there is surging within you a mighty desire to be free, to begin the new life untrammelled?

JOHN. Leave such maggots alone, Maggie.

MAGGIE. It's a shame of me not to give you up.

JOHN. I would consider you a very foolish woman if you did.

MAGGIE. If I were John Shand I would no more want to take Maggie Wylie with me through the beautiful door that has opened wide for you than I would want to take an old pair of shoon. Why don't you bang the door in my face, John? (*A tremor runs through* JOHN.)

JOHN. A bargain's a bargain, Maggie.

(MAGGIE *moves about, an eerie figure, breaking into little cries. She flutters round him, threateningly.*)

MAGGIE. Say one word about wanting to get out of it, and I'll put the lawyers on you.

JOHN. Have I hinted at such a thing?

MAGGIE. The document holds you hard and fast.

JOHN. It does.

(*She gloats miserably.*)

MAGGIE. The woman never rises with the man. I'll drag you down, John. I'll drag you down.

JOHN. Have no fear of that, I won't let you. I'm too strong.

MAGGIE. You'll miss the prettiest thing in the world, and all owing to me.

JOHN. What's that?

MAGGIE. Romance.

JOHN. Poof!

MAGGIE. All's cold and grey without it, John. They that have had it have slipped in and out of heaven.

JOHN. You're exaggerating, Maggie.

MAGGIE. You've worked so hard, you've had none of the fun that comes to most men long before they're your age.

JOHN. I never was one for fun. I cannot call to mind, Maggie, ever having laughed in my life.

MAGGIE. You have no sense of humour.

JOHN. Not a spark.

MAGGIE. I've sometimes thought that if you had, it might make you fonder of me. I think one needs a sense of humour to be fond of me.

JOHN. I remember reading of some one that said it needed a surgical operation to get a joke into a Scotsman's head.

MAGGIE. Yes, that's been said.

JOHN. What beats me, Maggie, is how you could insert a joke with an operation.

(*He considers this and gives it up.*)

MAGGIE. That's not the kind of fun I was thinking of. I mean fun with the lasses, John—gay, jolly, harmless fun. They could be impudent fashionable beauties now, stretching themselves to attract you, like that hiccoughing little devil, and running away from you, and crooking their fingers to you to run after them.

(*He draws a big breath.*)

JOHN. No, I never had that.

MAGGIE. It's every man's birthright, and you would have it now but for me.

JOHN. I can do without, Maggie.

MAGGIE. It's like missing out all the Saturdays.

JOHN. You feel sure, I suppose, that an older man wouldn't suit you better, Maggie?

MAGGIE. I couldn't feel surer of anything. You're just my ideal.

JOHN. Yes, yes. Well, that's as it should be.

(*She threatens him again.*)

MAGGIE. David has the document. It's carefully locked away.

JOHN. He would naturally take good care of it.

(*The pride of the Wylies deserts her.*)

MAGGIE. John, I make you a solemn promise that, in consideration of the circumstances of our marriage, if you should ever fall in love I'll act differently from other wives.

JOHN. There will be no occasion, Maggie.

(*Her voice becomes tremulous.*)

MAGGIE. John, David doesn't have the document. He thinks he has, but I have it here.

(*Somewhat heavily* JOHN *surveys the fatal paper.*)

JOHN. Well do I mind the look of it, Maggie. Yes, yes, that's it. Umpha!

MAGGIE. You don't ask why I've brought it.

JOHN. Why did you?

MAGGIE. Because I thought I might perhaps have the courage and the womanliness to give it back to you. (JOHN *has a brief dream.*) Will you never hold it up against me in the future that I couldn't do that?

JOHN. I promise you, Maggie, I never will.

MAGGIE. To go back to the Pans and take up my old life there, when all these six years my eyes have been centred on this night! I've been waiting for this night as long as you have been; and now to go back there, and wizen and dry up, when I might be married to John Shand!

JOHN. And you will be, Maggie. You have my word.

MAGGIE. Never—never—never. (*She tears up the document. He remains seated immovable, but the gleam returns to his eye. She rages first at herself and then at him.*) I'm a fool, a fool, to let you go. I tell you, you'll rue this day, for you need me, you'll come to grief without me. There's nobody can help you as I could have helped you. I'm essential to your career, and you're blind not to see it.

JOHN. What's that, Maggie? In no circumstances would I allow any meddling with my career.

MAGGIE. You would never have known I was meddling with it. But that's over. Don't be in too great a hurry to marry, John. Have your fling with the beautiful dolls first. Get the whiphand of the haughty ones, John. Give them their licks. Every time they hiccough let them have an extra slap in memory of me. And be sure to remember this, my man, that the one who marries you will find you out.

JOHN. Find me out?

MAGGIE. However careful a man is, his wife always finds out his failings.

JOHN. I don't know, Maggie, to what failings you refer.

(*The Cowcaddens Club has burst its walls, and is pouring this way to raise the new Member on its crest. The first wave hurls itself against the*

barber's shop with cries of 'Shand, Shand, Shand!' For a moment JOHN *stems the torrent by planting his back against the door.*)

You are acting under an impulse, Maggie, and I can't take advantage of it. Think the matter over, and we'll speak about it in the morning.

MAGGIE. No, I can't go through it again. It ends to-night and now. Good luck, John.

(*She is immediately submerged in the sea that surges through the door, bringing much wreckage with it. In a moment the place is so full that another cupful could not find standing room. Some slippery ones are squeezed upwards and remain aloft as warnings.* JOHN *has jumped on to the stair, and harangues the flood vainly like another Canute. It is something about freedom and noble minds, and, though unheard, goes to all heads, including the speaker's. By the time he is audible sentiment has him for her own.*)

JOHN. But, gentlemen, one may have too much even of freedom. (*No, no.*) Yes, Mr. Adamson. One may want to be tied. (*Never, never.*) I say yes, Willie Cameron; and I have found a young lady who I am proud to say is willing to be tied to me. I'm to be married! (*Uproar.*) Her name's Miss Wylie. (*Transport.*) Quiet; she's here now. (*Frenzy.*) She was here! Where are you, Maggie? (*A small voice* —'I'm here.' *A hundred great voices*—'Where—

where—where?' *The small voice*—'I'm so little none of you can see me.')

(*Three men, name of Wylie, buffet their way forward.*)

DAVID. James, father, have you grip of her?

ALICK. We've got her.

DAVID. Then hoist her up.

(*The queer little elated figure is raised aloft. With her fingers she can just touch the stars. Not unconscious of the nobility of his behaviour, the hero of the evening points an impressive finger at her.*)

JOHN. Gentlemen, the future Mrs. John Shand! (*Cries of 'Speech, speech!'*) No, no, being a lady she can't make a speech, but—

(*The heroine of the evening surprises him.*)

MAGGIE. I can make a speech, and I will make a speech, and it's in two words, and they're these—(*holding out her arms to enfold all the members of the Cowcaddens Club*)—My Constituents! (*Dementia.*)

ACT III

A FEW minutes ago the Comtesse de la Brière, who has not recently been in England, was shown into the London home of the Shands. Though not sufficiently interested to express her surprise in words, she raised her eyebrows on finding herself in a charming room; she had presumed that the Shand scheme of decoration would be as impossible as themselves.

It is the little room behind the dining-room for which English architects have long been famous; 'Make something of this, and you will indeed be a clever one,' they seem to say to you as they unveil it. The Comtesse finds that John has undoubtedly made something of it. It is his 'study' (mon Dieu, the words these English use!) and there is nothing in it that offends; there is so much not in it too that might so easily have been there. It is not in the least ornate; there are no colours quarrelling with each other (unseen, unheard by the blissful occupant of the revolving chair); the Comtesse has not even the gentle satisfaction of noting a 'suite' in stained oak. Nature might have taken a share in the decorations, so restful are they to the eyes; it is the working room of a man of culture, probably lately down from Oxford; at a first meeting there is nothing in it that pretends

to be what it is not. Our visitor is a little disappointed, but being fair-minded blows her absent host a kiss for disappointing her.

He has even, she observes with a twinkle, made something of the most difficult of his possessions, the little wife. For Maggie, who is here receiving her, has been quite creditably toned down. He has put her into a little grey frock that not only deals gently with her personal defects, but is in harmony with the room. Evidently, however, she has not 'risen' with him, for she is as stupid as ever; the Comtesse, who remembers having liked her the better of the two, could shake her for being so stupid. For instance, why is she not asserting herself in that other apartment?

The other apartment is really a correctly solemn dining-room, of which we have a glimpse through partly open folding-doors. At this moment it is harbouring Mr. Shand's ladies' committee, who sit with pens and foolscap round the large table, awaiting the advent of their leader. There are nobly wise ones and some foolish ones among them, for we are back in the strange days when it was considered 'unwomanly' for women to have minds. The Comtesse peeps at them with curiosity, as they arrange their papers or are ushered into the dining-room through a door which we cannot see. To her frivolous ladyship they are a species of wild fowl, and she is specially amused

to find her niece among them. She demands an explanation as soon as the communicating doors close.

COMTESSE. Tell me, since when has my dear Sybil become one of these ladies? It is not like her.

(MAGGIE *is obviously not clever enough to understand the woman question. Her eye rests longingly on a half-finished stocking as she innocently but densely replies:*)

MAGGIE. I think it was about the time that my husband took up their cause.

(*The* COMTESSE *has been hearing tales of* LADY SYBIL *and the barbarian; and after having the grace to hesitate, she speaks with the directness for which she is famed in Mayfair.*)

COMTESSE. Mrs. Shand, excuse me for saying that if half of what I hear be true, your husband is seeing that lady a great deal too often. (MAGGIE *is expressionless; she reaches for her stocking, whereat her guest loses patience.*) Oh, mon Dieu, put that down; you can buy them at two francs the pair. Mrs. Shand, why do not you compel yourself to take an intelligent interest in your husband's work?

MAGGIE. I typewrite his speeches.

COMTESSE. But do you know what they are about?

MAGGIE. They are about various subjects.

COMTESSE. Oh!

(*Did* MAGGIE *give her an unseen quizzical glance before demurely resuming the knitting? One is*

not certain, as JOHN *has come in, and this obliterates her. 'A Scotsman on the make,' of whom* DAVID *has spoken reverently, is still to be read —in a somewhat better bound volume—in* JOHN SHAND'S *person; but it is as doggedly honest a face as ever; and he champions women, not for personal ends, but because his blessed days of poverty gave him a light upon their needs. His self-satisfaction, however, has increased, and he has pleasantly forgotten some things. For instance, he can now call out 'Porter' at railway stations without dropping his hands for the barrow.* MAGGIE *introduces the* COMTESSE, *and he is still undaunted.*)

JOHN. I remember you well—at Glasgow.

COMTESSE. It must be quite two years ago, Mr. Shand.

(JOHN *has no objection to showing that he has had a classical education.*)

JOHN. *Tempus fugit,* Comtesse.

COMTESSE. I have not been much in this country since then, and I return to find you a coming man.

(*Fortunately his learning is tempered with modesty.*)

JOHN. Oh, I don't know, I don't know.

COMTESSE. The Ladies' Champion.

(*His modesty is tempered with a respect for truth.*)

JOHN. Well, well.

COMTESSE. And you are about, as I understand, to introduce a bill to give women an equal right with men to grow beards (*which is all she knows about it. He takes the remark literally*).

JOHN. There's nothing about beards in it, Comtesse. (*She gives him time to cogitate, and is pleased to note that there is no result.*) Have you typed my speech, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Yes; twenty-six pages. (*She produces it from a drawer.*)

(*Perhaps* JOHN *wishes to impress the visitor.*)

JOHN. I'm to give the ladies' committee a general idea of it. Just see, Maggie, if I know the peroration. 'In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, these are the reasonable demands of every intelligent Englishwoman'—I had better say British woman—'and I am proud to nail them to my flag'—

(*The visitor is properly impressed.*)

COMTESSE. Oho! defies his leaders!

JOHN. —'so long as I can do so without embarrassing the Government.'

COMTESSE. Ah, ah, Mr. Shand!

JOHN. 'I call upon the Front Bench, sir, loyally but firmly'—

COMTESSE. Firm again!

JOHN. —'either to accept my Bill, or to promise *without delay* to bring in one of their own; and if they decline to do so I solemnly warn them that

though I will not press the matter to a division just now'—

COMTESSE. Ahem!

JOHN. —'I will bring it forward again in the near future.' And now, Comtesse, *you* know that I'm not going to divide—and not another soul knows it.

COMTESSE. I am indeed flattered by your confidence.

JOHN. I've only told you because I don't care who knows now.

COMTESSE. Oh!

(*Somehow* MAGGIE *seems to be dissatisfied.*)

MAGGIE. But why is that, John?

JOHN. I daren't keep the Government in doubt any longer about what I mean to do. I'll show the whips the speech privately to-night.

MAGGIE (*who still wants to know*). But not to go to a division is hedging, isn't it? Is that strong?

JOHN. To make the speech at all, Maggie, is stronger than most would dare. They would *do* for me if I went to a division.

MAGGIE. Bark but not bite?

JOHN. Now, now, Maggie, you're out of your depth.

MAGGIE. I suppose that's it.

(*The* COMTESSE *remains in the shallows.*)

COMTESSE. But what will the ladies say, Mr. Shand?

JOHN. They won't like it. Comtesse, but they've got to lump it.

(*Here the maid appears with a card for* MAGGIE, *who considers it quietly.*)

JOHN. Any one of importance?

MAGGIE. No.

JOHN. Then I'm ready, Maggie.

(*This is evidently an intimation that she is to open the folding-doors, and he makes an effective entrance into the dining-room, his thumb in his waistcoat. There is a delicious clapping of hands from the committee, and the door closes. Not till then does* MAGGIE, *who has grown thoughtful, tell her maid to admit the visitor.*)

COMTESSE. Another lady, Mrs. Shand?

MAGGIE. The card says 'Mr. Charles Venables.'

(*The* COMTESSE *is really interested at last.*)

COMTESSE. Charles Venables! Do *you* know him?

MAGGIE. I think I call to mind meeting one of that name at the Foreign Office party.

COMTESSE. One of that name! He who is a Minister of your Cabinet. But as you know him so little why should he call on you?

MAGGIE. I wonder.

(MAGGIE'S *glance wanders to the drawer in which she has replaced* JOHN'S *speech.*)

COMTESSE. Well, well, I shall take care of you, petite.

MAGGIE. Do *you* know him?

COMTESSE. Do I know him! The last time I saw him he asked me to—to—hem!—ma chérie. it was thirty years ago.

MAGGIE. Thirty years!

COMTESSE. I was a pretty woman then. I dare say I shall detest him now; but if I find I do not—let us have a little plot—I shall drop this book; and then perhaps you will be so charming as—as not to be here for a little while?

(MR. VENABLES, *who enters, is such a courtly seigneur that he seems to bring the eighteenth century with him; you feel that his sedan chair is at the door. He stoops over* MAGGIE'S *plebeian hand.*)

VENABLES. I hope you will pardon my calling, Mrs. Shand; we had such a pleasant talk the other evening.

(MAGGIE, *of course, is at once deceived by his gracious manner.*)

MAGGIE. I think it's kind of you. Do you know each other? The Comtesse de la Brière.

(*He repeats the name with some emotion, and the* COMTESSE, *half mischievously, half sadly, holds a hand before her face.*)

VENABLES. Comtesse.

COMTESSE. Thirty years, Mr. Venables.

(*He gallantly removes the hand that screens her face.*)

VENABLES. It does not seem so much.

(*She gives him a similar scrutiny.*)

COMTESSE. Mon Dieu, it seems all that!

(*They smile rather ruefully.* MAGGIE *like a kind hostess relieves the tension.*)

MAGGIE. The Comtesse has taken a cottage in Surrey for the summer.

VENABLES. I am overjoyed.

COMTESSE. No, Charles, you are not. You no longer care. Fickle one! And it is only thirty years.

(*He sinks into a chair beside her.*)

VENABLES. Those heavenly evenings, Comtesse, on the Bosphorus.

COMTESSE. I refuse to talk of them. I hate you.

(*But she drops the book, and* MAGGIE *fades from the room. It is not a very clever departure, and the old diplomatist smiles. Then he sighs a beautiful sigh, for he does all things beautifully.*)

VENABLES. It is moonlight, Comtesse, on the Golden Horn.

COMTESSE. Who are those two young things in a caique?

VENABLES. Is he the brave Leander, Comtesse, and is she Hero of the Lamp?

COMTESSE. No, she is the foolish wife of the French Ambassador, and he is a good-for-nothing British attaché trying to get her husband's secrets out of her.

VENABLES. Is it possible! They part at a certain garden gate.

COMTESSE. Oh, Charles, Charles!

VENABLES. But you promised to come back; I waited there till dawn. Blanche, if you *had* come back—

COMTESSE. How is Mrs. Venables?

VENABLES. She is rather poorly. *I* think it's gout.

COMTESSE. And you?

VENABLES. I creak a little in the mornings.

COMTESSE. So do I. There is such a good man at Wiesbaden.

VENABLES. The Homburg fellow is better. The way he patched me up last summer—Oh, Lord, Lord!

COMTESSE. Yes, Charles, the game is up; we are two old fogies. (*They groan in unison; then she raps him sharply on the knuckles.*) Tell me, sir, what are you doing here?

VENABLES. Merely a friendly call.

COMTESSE. I do not believe it.

VENABLES. The same woman; the old delightful candour.

COMTESSE. The same man; the old fibs. (*She sees that the door is asking a question.*) Yes, come, Mrs. Shand, I have had quite enough of him; I warn you he is here for some crafty purpose.

MAGGIE (*drawing back timidly*). Surely not?

VENABLES. Really, Comtesse, you make conversation difficult. To show that my intentions are innocent, Mrs. Shand, I propose that you choose the subject.

MAGGIE (*relieved*). There, Comtesse.

VENABLES. I hope your husband is well?

MAGGIE. Yes, thank you. (*With a happy thought*) I decide that we talk about him.

VENABLES. If you wish it.

COMTESSE. Be careful; *he* has chosen the subject.

MAGGIE. *I* chose it, didn't I?

VENABLES. You know you did.

MAGGIE (*appealingly*). You admire John?

VENABLES. Very much. But he puzzles me a little. You Scots, Mrs. Shand, are such a mixture of the practical and the emotional that you escape out of an Englishman's hand like a trout.

MAGGIE (*open-eyed*). Do we?

VENABLES. Well, not you, but your husband. I have known few men make a worse beginning in the House. He had the most atrocious bow-wow public-park manner—

COMTESSE. I remember that manner!

MAGGIE. No, he hadn't.

VENABLES (*soothingly*). At first. But by his second session he had shed all that, and he is now a pleasure to listen to. By the way, Comtesse, have you found any dark intention in that?

COMTESSE. You wanted to know whether he talks over these matters with his wife; and she has told you that he does not.

MAGGIE (*indignantly*). I haven't said a word about it, have I?

VENABLES. Not a word. Then, again, I admire him for his impromptu speeches.

MAGGIE. What is impromptu?

VENABLES. Unprepared. They have contained some grave blunders, not so much of judgment as of taste—

MAGGIE (*hotly*). *I* don't think so.

VENABLES. Pardon me. But he has righted himself subsequently in the neatest way. I have always found that the man whose second thoughts are good is worth watching. Well, Comtesse, I see you have something to say.

COMTESSE. You are wondering whether she can tell you who gives him his second thoughts.

MAGGIE. Gives them to John? I would like to see anybody try to give thoughts to John.

VENABLES. Quite so.

COMTESSE. Is there anything more that has roused your admiration, Charles?

VENABLES (*purring*). Let me see. Yes, we are all much edified by his humour.

COMTESSE (*surprised indeed*). His humour? That man!

MAGGIE (*with hauteur*). Why not?

VENABLES. I assure you, Comtesse, some of the neat things in his speeches convulse the House. A word has even been coined for them—Shandisms.

COMTESSE (*slowly recovering from a blow*). Humour!

VENABLES. In conversation, I admit, he strikes one as being—ah—somewhat lacking in humour.

COMTESSE (*pouncing*). You are wondering who supplies his speeches with the humour.

MAGGIE. Supplies John?

VENABLES. Now that you mention it, some of his Shandisms do have a curiously feminine quality.

COMTESSE. You have thought it might be a woman.

VENABLES. Really, Comtesse—

COMTESSE. I see it all. Charles, you thought it might be the wife!

VENABLES (*flinging up his hands*). I own up.

MAGGIE (*bewildered*). Me?

VENABLES. Forgive me, I see I was wrong.

MAGGIE (*alarmed*). Have I been doing John any harm?

VENABLES. On the contrary, I am relieved to know that there are no hairpins in his speeches. If he is at home, Mrs. Shand, may I see him? I am going to be rather charming to him.

MAGGIE (*drawn in two directions*). Yes, he is—oh yes—but—

VENABLES. That is to say, Comtesse, if he proves himself the man I believe him to be.

(*This arrests* MAGGIE *almost as she has reached the dining-room door.*)

MAGGIE (*hesitating*). He is very busy just now.

VENABLES (*smiling*). I think he will see me.

MAGGIE. Is it something about his speech?

VENABLES (*the smile hardening*). Well, yes, it is.

MAGGIE. Then I dare say I could tell you what you want to know without troubling him, as I've been typing it.

VENABLES (*with a sigh*). I don't acquire information in that way.

COMTESSE. I trust not.

MAGGIE. There's no secret about it. He is to show it to the whips to-night.

VENABLES (*sharply*). You are sure of that?

COMTESSE. It is quite true, Charles. I heard him say so; and indeed he repeated what he called the 'peroration' before me.

MAGGIE. I know it by heart. (*She plays a bold game.*) 'These are the demands of all intelligent British women, and I am proud to nail them to my flag'—

COMTESSE. The very words, Mrs. Shand.

MAGGIE (*looking at her imploringly*). 'And I don't care how they may embarrass the Government.' (*The* COMTESSE *is bereft of speech, so suddenly has*

she been introduced to the real MAGGIE SHAND.) 'If the right honourable gentleman will give us his pledge to introduce a similar Bill this session I will willingly withdraw mine; but otherwise I solemnly warn him that I will press the matter now to a division.'

(*She turns her face from the great man; she has gone white.*)

VENABLES (*after a pause*). Capital.

(*The blood returns to* MAGGIE'S *heart.*)

COMTESSE (*who is beginning to enjoy herself very much*). Then you are pleased to know that he means to, as you say, go to a division?

VENABLES. Delighted. The courage of it will be the making of him.

COMTESSE. I see.

VENABLES. Had he been to hedge we should have known that he was a pasteboard knight and have disregarded him.

COMTESSE. I see.

(*She desires to catch the eye of* MAGGIE, *but it is carefully turned from her.*)

VENABLES. Mrs. Shand, let us have him in at once.

COMTESSE. Yes, yes, indeed.

(MAGGIE'S *anxiety returns, but she has to call* JOHN *in.*)

JOHN (*impressed*). Mr. Venables! This is an honour.

VENABLES. How are you, Shand?

JOHN. Sit down, sit down. (*Becoming himself again.*) I can guess what you have come about.

VENABLES. Ah, you Scotsmen.

JOHN. Of course I know I'm harassing the Government a good deal—

VENABLES (*blandly*). Not at all, Shand. The Government are very pleased.

JOHN. You don't expect me to believe that?

VENABLES. I called here to give you the proof of it. You may know that we are to have a big meeting at Leeds on the 24th, when two Ministers are to speak. There is room for a third speaker, and I am authorised to offer that place to you.

JOHN. To me!

VENABLES. Yes.

JOHN (*swelling*). It would be—the Government taking me up.

VENABLES. Don't make too much of it; it would be an acknowledgment that they look upon you as one of their likely young men.

MAGGIE. John!

JOHN (*not found wanting in a trying hour*). It's a bribe. You are offering me this on condition that I don't make my speech. How can you think so meanly of me as to believe that I would play the women's cause false for the sake of my own advancement. I refuse your bribe.

VENABLES (*liking him for the first time*). Good. But you are wrong. There are no conditions, and we want you to make your speech. Now do you accept?

JOHN (*still suspicious*). If you make me the same offer after you have read it. I insist on your reading it first.

VENABLES (*sighing*). By all means.

(MAGGIE *is in an agony as she sees* JOHN *hand the speech to his leader. On the other hand, the* COMTESSE *thrills.*)

But I assure you we look on the speech as a small matter. The important thing is your intention of going to a division; and we agree to that also.

JOHN (*losing his head*). What's that?

VENABLES. Yes, we agree.

JOHN. But—but—why, you have been threatening to excommunicate me if I dared.

VENABLES. All done to test you, Shand.

JOHN. To test me?

VENABLES. We know that a division on your Bill can have no serious significance; we shall see to that. And so the test was to be whether you had the pluck to divide the House. Had you been intending to talk big in this speech, and then hedge, through fear of the Government, they would have had no further use for you.

JOHN (*heavily*). I understand. (*But there is one*

thing he cannot understand, which is, why VENABLES *should be so sure that he is not to hedge.*)

VENABLES (*turning over the pages carelessly*). Any of your good things in this, Shand?

JOHN (*whose one desire is to get the pages back*). No, I—no—it isn't necessary you should read it now.

VENABLES (*from politeness only*). Merely for my own pleasure. I shall look through it this evening. (*He rolls up the speech to put it in his pocket.* JOHN *turns despairingly to* MAGGIE, *though well aware that no help can come from her.*)

MAGGIE. That's the only copy there is, John. (*To* VENABLES) Let me make a fresh one, and send it to you in an hour or two.

VENABLES (*good-naturedly*). I could not put you to that trouble, Mrs. Shand. I will take good care of it.

MAGGIE. If anything were to happen to you on the way home, wouldn't whatever is in your pocket be considered to be the property of your heirs?

VENABLES (*laughing*). Now there is forethought! Shand, I think that after that—! (*He returns the speech to* JOHN, *whose hand swallows it greedily.*) She is Scotch too, Comtesse.

COMTESSE (*delighted*). Yes, she is Scotch too.

VENABLES. Though the only persons likely to do for me in the street, Shand, are your ladies' commit-

tee. Ever since they took the horse out of my brougham, I can scent them a mile away.

COMTESSE. A mile? Charles, peep in there.

(*He softly turns the handle of the dining-room door, and realises that his scent is not so good as he had thought it. He bids his hostess and the* COMTESSE *good-bye in a burlesque whisper and tiptoes off to safer places.* JOHN *having gone out with him,* MAGGIE *can no longer avoid the* COMTESSE'S *reproachful eye. That much injured lady advances upon her with accusing finger.*)

COMTESSE. So, madam!

(MAGGIE *is prepared for her.*)

MAGGIE. I don't know what you mean.

COMTESSE. Yes, you do. I mean that there *is* some one who 'helps' our Mr. Shand.

MAGGIE. There's not.

COMTESSE. And it *is* a woman, and it's you.

MAGGIE. I help in the little things.

COMTESSE. The little things! You are the Pin he picked up and that is to make his fortune. And now what I want to know is whether your John is aware that you help at all.

(JOHN *returns, and at once provides the answer.*)

JOHN. Maggie, Comtesse, I've done it again!

MAGGIE. I'm so glad, John.

(*The* COMTESSE *is in an ecstasy.*)

COMTESSE. And all because you were not to hedge, Mr. Shand.

(*His appeal to her with the wistfulness of a schoolboy makes him rather attractive.*)

JOHN. You won't tell on me, Comtesse! (*He thinks it out.*) They had just guessed I would be firm because they know I'm a strong man. You little saw, Maggie, what a good turn you were doing me when you said you wanted to make another copy of the speech.

(*She is dense.*)

MAGGIE. How, John?

JOHN. Because now I can alter the end.

(*She is enlightened.*)

MAGGIE. So you can!

JOHN. Here's another lucky thing, Maggie: I hadn't told the ladies' committee that I was to hedge, and so they need never know. Comtesse, I tell you there's a little cherub who sits up aloft and looks after the career of John Shand.

(*The* COMTESSE *looks not aloft but toward the chair at present occupied by* MAGGIE.)

COMTESSE. Where does she sit, Mr. Shand?

(*He knows that women are not well read.*)

JOHN. It's just a figure of speech.

(*He returns airily to his committee room; and now again you may hear the click of* MAGGIE'S

needles. They no longer annoy the COMTESSE; *she is setting them to music.*)

COMTESSE. It is not down here she sits, Mrs. Shand, knitting a stocking.

MAGGIE. No, it isn't.

COMTESSE. And when I came in I gave him credit for everything; even for the prettiness of the room!

MAGGIE. He has beautiful taste.

COMTESSE. Good-bye, Scotchy.

MAGGIE. Good-bye, Comtesse, and thank you for coming.

COMTESSE. Good-bye—Miss Pin.

(MAGGIE *rings genteelly.*)

MAGGIE. Good-bye.

(*The* COMTESSE *is now lost in admiration of her.*)

COMTESSE. You divine little wife. He can't be worthy of it, no man could be worthy of it. Why do you do it?

(MAGGIE *shivers a little.*)

MAGGIE. He loves to think he does it all himeslf; that's the way of men. I'm six years older than he is. I'm plain, and I have no charm. I shouldn't have let him marry me. I'm trying to make up for it.

(*The* COMTESSE *kisses her and goes away.* MAGGIE, *somewhat foolishly, resumes her knitting.*

Some days later this same room is listening—

with the same inattention—to the outpouring of JOHN SHAND'S *love for the lady of the hiccoughs. We arrive—by arrangement—rather late; and thus we miss some of the most delightful of the pangs.*

One can see that these two are playing no game, or, if they are, that they little know it. The wonders of the world (so strange are the instruments chosen by Love) have been revealed to JOHN *in hiccoughs; he shakes in* SYBIL'S *presence; never were more swimming eyes; he who has been of a wooden face till now, with ways to match, has gone on flame like a piece of paper; emotion is in flood in him. We may be almost fond of* JOHN *for being so worshipful of love. Much has come to him that we had almost despaired of his acquiring, including nearly all the divine attributes except that sense of humour. The beautiful* SYBIL *has always possessed but little of it also, and what she had has been struck from her by Cupid's flail. Naked of the saving grace, they face each other in awful rapture.)*

JOHN. In a room, Sybil, I go to you as a cold man to a fire. You fill me like a peal of bells in an empty house.

(She is being brutally treated by the dear impediment, for which hiccough is such an inadequate name that even to spell it is an abomina-

tion though a sign of ability. How to describe a sound that is noiseless? Let us put it thus, that when SYBIL *wants to say something very much there are little obstacles in her way; she falters, falls perhaps once, and then is over, the while her appealing orbs beg you not to be angry with her. We may express those sweet pauses in precious dots, which some clever person can afterwards string together and make a pearl necklace of them.*)

SYBIL. I should not . . . let you say it, . . . but . . . you . . . say it so beautifully.

JOHN. You must have guessed.

SYBIL. I dreamed . . . I feared . . . but you were . . . Scotch, and I didn't know what to think.

JOHN. Do you know what first attracted me to you, Sybil? It was your insolence. I thought, 'I'll break her insolence for her.'

SYBIL. And I thought . . . 'I'll break his str . . . ength!'

JOHN. And now your cooing voice plays round me; the softness of you, Sybil, in your pretty clothes makes me think of young birds. (*The impediment is now insurmountable; she has to swim for it, she swims toward him.*) It is you who inspire my work.

(*He thrills to find that she can be touched without breaking.*)

SYBIL. I am so glad . . . so proud . . .

JOHN. And others know it, Sybil, as well as I. Only yesterday the Comtesse said to me, 'No man could get on so fast unaided. *Cherchez la femme,* Mr. Shand.'

SYBIL. Auntie said that?

JOHN. I said 'Find her yourself, Comtesse.'

SYBIL. And she?

JOHN. She said 'I have found her,' and I said in my blunt way, 'You mean Lady Sybil,' and she went away laughing.

SYBIL. Laughing?

JOHN. I seem to amuse the woman.

(SYBIL *grows sad.*)

SYBIL. If Mrs. Shand— It is so cruel to her. Whom did you say she had gone to the station to meet?

JOHN. Her father and brothers.

SYBIL. It is so cruel to them. We must think no more of this. It is mad . . . ness.

JOHN. It's fate. Sybil, let us declare our love openly.

SYBIL. You can't ask that, now in the first moment that you tell me of it.

JOHN. The one thing I won't do even for you is to live a life of underhand.

SYBIL. The . . . blow to her.

JOHN. Yes. But at least she has always known that I never loved her.

SYBIL. It is asking me to give . . . up everything, every one, for you.

JOHN. It's too much.

(JOHN *is humble at last.*)

SYBIL. To a woman who truly loves, even that is not too much. Oh! it is not I who matter—it is you.

JOHN. My dear, my dear.

SYBIL. So gladly would I do it to save you; but, oh, if it were to bring you down!

JOHN. Nothing can keep me down if I have you to help me.

SYBIL. I am dazed, John, I . . .

JOHN. My love, my love.

SYBIL. I . . . oh . . . here . . .

JOHN. Be brave, Sybil, be brave.

SYBIL. . . . . .

(*In this bewilderment of pearls she melts into his arms.* MAGGIE *happens to open the door just then; but neither fond heart hears her.*)

JOHN. I can't walk along the streets, Sybil, without looking in all the shop windows for what I think would become you best. (*As awkwardly as though his heart still beat against corduroy, he takes from his pocket a pendant and its chain. He is shy, and she drops pearls over the beauty of the ruby which is its only stone.*) It is a drop of my blood, Sybil.

(*Her lovely neck is outstretched, and he puts the chain round it.* MAGGIE *withdraws as silently as*

she had come; but perhaps the door whispered 'd—n' as it closed, for SYBIL *wakes out of Paradise.*)

SYBIL. I thought— Did the door shut?

JOHN. It was shut already.

(*Perhaps it is only that* SYBIL *is bewildered to find herself once again in a world that has doors.*)

SYBIL. It seemed to me—

JOHN. There was nothing. But I think I hear voices; they may have arrived.

(*Some pretty instinct makes* SYBIL *go farther from him.* MAGGIE *kindly gives her time for this by speaking before opening the door.*)

MAGGIE. That will do perfectly, David. The maid knows where to put them. (*She comes in.*) They've come, John; they *would* help with the luggage. (JOHN *goes out.* MAGGIE *is agreeably surprised to find a visitor.*) How do you do, Lady Sybil? This is nice of you.

SYBIL. I was so sorry not to find you in, Mrs. Shand.

(*The impediment has run away. It is only for those who love it.*)

MAGGIE. Thank you. You'll sit down?

SYBIL. I think not; your relatives—

MAGGIE. They will be so proud to see that you are my friend.

(If MAGGIE *were less simple her guest would feel more comfortable. She tries to make conversation.)*

SYBIL. It is their first visit to London?

(Instead of relieving her anxiety on this point, MAGGIE *has a long look at the gorgeous armful.)*

MAGGIE. I'm glad you are so beautiful, Lady Sybil.

(The beautiful one is somehow not flattered. She pursues her investigations with growing uneasiness.)

SYBIL. One of them is married now, isn't he? *(Still there is no answer;* MAGGIE *continues looking at her, and shivers slightly.)* Have they travelled from Scotland to-day? Mrs. Shand, why do you look at me so? The door did open! (MAGGIE *nods.)* What are you to do?

MAGGIE. That would be telling. Sit down, my pretty.

(As SYBIL *subsides into what the Wylies with one glance would call the best chair,* MAGGIE'S *men-folk are brought in by* JOHN, *all carrying silk hats and looking very active after their long rest in the train. They are gazing about them. They would like this lady, they would like* JOHN, *they would even like* MAGGIE *to go away for a little and leave them to examine the room. Is that linen on the walls, for instance, or just paper? Is the carpet as thick as it feels, or is there*

brown paper beneath it? Had MAGGIE *got anything off that bookcase on account of the wormholes?* DAVID *even discovers that we were simpletons when we said there was nothing in the room that pretended to be what it was not. He taps the marble mantelpiece, and is favourably impressed by the tinny sound.*)

DAVID. Very fine imitation. It's a capital house, Maggie.

MAGGIE. I'm so glad you like it. Do you know one another? This is my father and my brothers, Lady Sybil.

(*The lovely form inclines towards them.* ALICK *and* JOHN *remain firm on their legs, but* JAMES *totters.*)

JAMES. A ladyship! Well done, Maggie.

ALICK (*sharply*). James! I remember you, my lady.

MAGGIE. Sit down, father. This is the study.

(JAMES *wanders round it inquisitively until called to order.*)

SYBIL. You must be tired after your long journey.

DAVID (*drawing the portraits of himself and partners in one lightning sketch*). Tired, your ladyship? We sat on cushioned seats the whole way.

JAMES (*looking about him for the chair you sit on*). Every seat in this room is cushioned.

MAGGIE. You may say all my life is cushioned now, James, by this dear man of mine.

(*She gives* JOHN'S *shoulder a loving pressure, which* SYBIL *feels is a telegraphic communication to herself in a cypher that she cannot read.* ALICK *and the* BROTHERS *bask in the evidence of* MAGGIE'S *happiness.*)

JOHN (*uncomfortably*). And is Elizabeth hearty, James?

JAMES (*looking down his nose in the manner proper to young husbands when addressed about their wives.*) She's very well, I thank you kindly.

MAGGIE. James is a married man now, Lady Sybil.

(SYBIL *murmurs her congratulations.*)

JAMES. I thank you kindly. (*Courageously*) Yes, I'm married. (*He looks at* DAVID *and* ALICK *to see if they are smiling; and they are.*) It wasn't a case of being catched; it was entirely of my own free will. (*He looks again; and the mean fellows are smiling still.*) Is your ladyship married?

SYBIL. Alas! no.

DAVID. James! (*Politely*) You will be yet, my lady.

(SYBIL *indicates that he is kind indeed.*)

JOHN. Perhaps they would like you to show them their rooms, Maggie?

DAVID. Fine would we like to see all the house as well as the sleeping accommodation. But first— (*He*

gives his father the look with which chairmen call on the next speaker.)

ALICK. I take you, David. (*He produces a paper parcel from a roomy pocket.*) It wasn't likely, Mr. Shand, that we should forget the day.

JOHN. The day?

DAVID. The second anniversary of your marriage. We came purposely for the day.

JAMES (*his fingers itching to take the parcel from his father*). It's a lace shawl, Maggie, from the three of us, a pure Tobermory; you would never dare wear it if you knew the cost.

(*The shawl in its beauty is revealed, and* MAGGIE *hails it with little cries of joy. She rushes at the donors and kisses each of them just as if she were a pretty woman. They are much pleased and give expression to their pleasure in a not very dissimilar manner.*)

ALICK. Havers.

DAVID. Havers.

JAMES. Havers.

JOHN. It's a very fine shawl.

(*He should not have spoken, for he has set* JAMES'S *volatile mind working.*)

JAMES. You may say so. What did you give her, Mr. Shand?

JOHN (*suddenly deserted by God and man*). Me?

ALICK. Yes, yes, let's see it.

JOHN. Oh—I—

(*He is not deserted by* MAGGIE, *but she can think of no way out.*)

SYBIL (*prompted by the impediment, which is in hiding, quite close*). Did he . . . forget?

(*There is more than a touch of malice in the question. It is a challenge, and the Wylies as a family are almost too quick to accept a challenge.*)

MAGGIE (*lifting the gage of battle*). John forget? Never! It's a pendant, father.

(*The impediment bolts.* JOHN *rises.*)

ALICK. A pendant? One of those things on a chain?

(*He grins, remembering how once, about sixty years ago, he and a lady and a pendant—but we have no time for this.*)

MAGGIE. Yes.

DAVID (*who has felt the note of antagonism and is troubled*). You were slow in speaking of it, Mr. Shand.

MAGGIE. (*This is her fight.*) He was shy, because he thought you might blame him for extravagance.

DAVID (*relieved*). Oh, that's it.

JAMES (*licking his lips*). Let's see it.

MAGGIE (*a daughter of the devil*). Where did you put it, John?

(JOHN'S *mouth opens but has nothing to contribute.*)

SYBIL (*the impediment has stolen back again*). Perhaps it has been . . . mislaid.

(*The* BROTHERS *echo the word incredulously.*)

MAGGIE. Not it. I can't think where we laid it down, John. It's not on that table, is it, James? (*The Wylies turn to look, and* MAGGIE'S *hand goes out to* LADY SYBIL: JOHN SHAND, *witness. It is a very determined hand, and presently a pendant is placed in it.*) Here it is! (ALICK *and the* BROTHERS *cluster round it, weigh it and appraise it.*)

ALICK. Preserve me. Is that stone real, Mr. Shand?

JOHN (*who has begun to look his grimmest*). Yes.

MAGGIE (*who is now ready, if he wishes it, to take him on too*). John says it's a drop of his blood.

JOHN (*wishing it*). And so it is.

DAVID. Well said, Mr. Shand.

MAGGIE (*scared*). And now, if you'll all come with me, I think John has something he wants to talk over with Lady Sybil. (*Recovering and taking him on*) Or would you prefer, John, to say it before us all?

SYBIL (*gasping*). No!

JOHN (*flinging back his head*). Yes, I prefer to say it before you all.

MAGGIE (*flinging back hers*). Then sit down again.

(*The Wylies wonderingly obey.*)

SYBIL. Mr. Shand, Mr. Shand!—

JOHN. Maggie knows, and it was only for her I was troubled. Do you think I'm afraid of *them?* (*With mighty relief*) Now we can be open.

DAVID (*lowering*). What is it? What's wrong, John Shand?

JOHN (*facing him squarely*). It was to Lady Sybil I gave the pendant, and all my love with it. (*Perhaps* JAMES *utters a cry, but the silence of* ALICK *and* DAVID *is more terrible.*)

SYBIL (*whose voice is smaller than we had thought*). What are you to do?

(*It is to* MAGGIE *she is speaking.*)

DAVID. She'll leave it for us to do.

JOHN. That's what I want.

(*The lords of creation look at the ladies.*)

MAGGIE (*interpreting*). You and I are expected to retire, Lady Sybil, while the men decide our fate. (SYBIL *is ready to obey the law, but* MAGGIE *remains seated*). Man's the oak, woman's the ivy. Which of us is it that's to cling to you, John?

(*With three stalwarts glaring at him,* JOHN *rather grandly takes* SYBIL'S *hand. They are two against the world.*)

SYBIL (*a heroine*). I hesitated, but I am afraid no longer; whatever he asks of me I will do.

(*Evidently the first thing he asks of her is to await him in the dining-room.*)

It will mean surrendering everything for him. I am

glad it means all that. (*She passes into the dining-room looking as pretty as a kiss.*)

MAGGIE. So that settles it.

ALICK. I'm thinking that doesn't settle it.

DAVID. No, by God! (*But his love for* MAGGIE *steadies him. There is even a note of entreaty in his voice*). Have you nothing to say to her, man?

JOHN. I have things to say to her, but not before you.

DAVID (*sternly*). Go away, Maggie. Leave him to us.

JAMES (*who thinks it is about time that he said something*). Yes, leave him to us.

MAGGIE. No, David, I want to hear what is to become of me; I promise not to take any side.

(*And sitting by the fire she resumes her knitting. The four regard her as on an evening at The Pans a good many years ago.*)

DAVID (*barking*). How long has this been going on?

JOHN. If you mean how long has that lady been the apple of my eye, I'm not sure; but I never told her of it until to-day.

MAGGIE (*thoughtfully and without dropping a stitch*). I think it wasn't till about six months ago, John, that she began to be very dear to you. At first you liked to bring in her name when talking to me, so that I could tell you of any little things I might

have heard she was doing. But afterwards, as she became more and more to you, you avoided mentioning her name.

JOHN (*surprised*). Did you notice that?

MAGGIE (*in her old-fashioned way*). Yes.

JOHN. I tried to be done with it for your sake. I've often had a sore heart for you, Maggie.

JAMES. You're proving it!

MAGGIE. Yes, James, he had. I've often seen him looking at me very sorrowfully of late because of what was in his mind; and many a kindly little thing he has done for me that he didn't use to do.

JOHN. You noticed that too!

MAGGIE. Yes.

DAVID (*controlling himself*). Well, we won't go into that; the thing to be thankful for is that it's ended.

ALICK (*who is looking very old*). Yes, yes, that's the great thing.

JOHN. All useless, sir, it's not ended; it's to go on.

DAVID. There's a devil in you, John Shand.

JOHN (*who is an unhappy man just now*). I dare say there is. But do you think he had a walk over, Mr. David?

JAMES. Man, I could knock you down!

MAGGIE. There's not one of you could knock John down.

DAVID (*exasperated*). Quiet, Maggie. One would think you were taking his part.

MAGGIE. Do you expect me to desert him at the very moment that he needs me most?

DAVID. It's him that's deserting you.

JOHN. Yes, Maggie, that's what it is.

ALICK. Where's your marriage vow? And your church attendances?

JAMES (*with terrible irony*). And your prize for moral philosophy?

JOHN (*recklessly*). All gone whistling down the wind.

DAVID. I suppose you understand that you'll have to resign your seat?

JOHN (*his underlip much in evidence*). There are hundreds of seats, but there's only one John Shand.

MAGGIE (*but we don't hear her*). That's how I like to hear him speak.

DAVID (*the ablest person in the room*). Think, man, I'm old by you, and for long I've had a pride in you. It will be beginning the world again with more against you than there was eight years ago.

JOHN. I have a better head to begin it with than I had eight years ago.

ALICK (*hoping this will bite*). She'll have her own money, David!

JOHN. She's as poor as a mouse.

JAMES (*thinking possibly of his Elizabeth's*

mother). We'll go to her friends, and tell them all. They'll stop it.

JOHN. She's of age.

JAMES. They'll take her far away.

JOHN. I'll follow, and tear her from them.

ALICK. Your career--

JOHN (*to his credit*). To hell with my career. Do you think I don't know I'm on the rocks? What can you, or you, or you, understand of the passions of a man! I've fought, and I've given in. When a ship founders, as I suppose I'm foundering, it's not a thing to yelp at. Peace, all of you. (*He strides into the dining-room, where we see him at times pacing the floor.*)

DAVID (*to* JAMES, *who gives signs of a desire to take off his coat*). Let him be. We can't budge him. (*With bitter wisdom*) It's true what he says, true at any rate about me. What do I know of the passions of a man! I'm up against something I don't understand.

ALICK. It's something wicked.

DAVID. I dare say it is, but it's something big.

JAMES. It's that damned charm.

MAGGIE (*still by the fire*). That's it. What was it that made you fancy Elizabeth, James?

JAMES (*sheepishly*). I can scarcely say.

MAGGIE. It was her charm.

DAVID. *Her* charm!

JAMES (*pugnaciously*). Yes, *her* charm.

MAGGIE. She had charm for James.

(*This somehow breaks them up.* MAGGIE *goes from one to another with an odd little smile flickering on her face.*)

DAVID. Put on your things, Maggie, and we'll leave his house.

MAGGIE (*patting his kind head*). Not me, David.

(*This is a* MAGGIE *they have known but forgotten; all three brighten.*)

DAVID. You haven't given in!

(*The smile flickers and expires.*)

MAGGIE. I want you all to go upstairs, and let me have my try now.

JAMES. Your try?

ALICK. Maggie, you put new life into me.

JAMES. And into me.

(DAVID *says nothing; the way he grips her shoulder says it for him.*)

MAGGIE. I'll save him, David, if I can.

DAVID. Does he deserve to be saved after the way he has treated you?

MAGGIE. You stupid David. What has that to do with it?

(*When they have gone,* JOHN *comes to the door of the dining-room. There is welling up in him a great pity for* MAGGIE, *but it has to subside a little when he sees that the knitting is still in her*

hand. No man likes to be so soon supplanted. SYBIL *follows, and the two of them gaze at the active needles.*)

MAGGIE (*perceiving that she has visitors*). Come in, John. Sit down, Lady Sybil, and make yourself comfortable. I'm afraid we've put you about.

(*She is, after all, only a few years older than they and scarcely looks her age; yet it must have been in some such way as this that the little old woman who lived in a shoe addressed her numerous progeny.*)

JOHN. I'm mortal sorry, Maggie.

SYBIL (*who would be more courageous if she could hold his hand*). And I also.

MAGGIE (*soothingly*). I'm sure you are. But as it can't be helped I see no reason why we three shouldn't talk the matter over in a practical way.

(SYBIL *looks doubtful, but* JOHN *hangs on desperately to the word practical.*)

JOHN. If you could understand, Maggie, what an inspiration she is to me and my work.

SYBIL. Indeed, Mrs. Shand, I think of nothing else.

MAGGIE. That's fine. That's as it should be.

SYBIL (*talking too much*). Mrs. Shand, I think you are very kind to take it so reasonably.

MAGGIE. That's the Scotch way. When were you thinking of leaving me, John?

(*Perhaps this is the Scotch way also; but* SYBIL

is English, and from the manner in which she starts you would say that something has fallen on her toes.)

JOHN (*who has heard nothing fall*). I think, now that it has come to a breach, the sooner the better. (*His tone becomes that of* JAMES *when asked after the health of his wife.*) When it is convenient to you, Maggie.

MAGGIE (*making a rapid calculation*). It couldn't well be before Wednesday. That's the day the laundry comes home.

(SYBIL *has to draw in her toes again.*)

JOHN. And it's the day the House rises. (*Stifling a groan*) It may be my last appearance in the House.

SYBIL (*her arms yearning for him*). No, no, please don't say that.

MAGGIE (*surveying them sympathetically*). You love the House, don't you, John, next to her? It's a pity you can't wait till after your speech at Leeds. Mr. Venables won't let you speak at Leeds, I fear, if you leave me.

JOHN. What a chance it would have been. But let it go.

MAGGIE. The meeting is in less than a month. Could you not make it such a speech that they would be very loth to lose you?

JOHN (*swelling*). That's what was in my mind.

SYBIL (*with noble confidence*). And he could have done it.

MAGGIE. Then we've come to something practical.

JOHN (*exercising his imagination with powerful effect*). No, it wouldn't be fair to you if I was to stay on now.

MAGGIE. Do you think I'll let myself be considered when your career is at stake? A month will soon pass for me; I'll have a lot of packing to do.

JOHN. It's noble of you, but I don't deserve it, and I can't take it from you.

MAGGIE. Now's the time, Lady Sybil, for you to have one of your inspiring ideas.

SYBIL (*ever ready*). Yes, yes—but what?

(*It is odd that they should both turn to* MAGGIE *at this moment.*)

MAGGIE (*who has already been saying it to herself*). What do you think of this: I can stay on here with my father and brothers; and you, John, can go away somewhere and devote yourself to your speech?

SYBIL. Yes.

JOHN. That might be. (*Considerately*) Away from both of you? Where could I go?

SYBIL (*ever ready*). Where?

MAGGIE. I know.

(*She has called up a number on the telephone before they have time to check her.*)

JOHN (*on his dignity*). Don't be in such a hurry, Maggie.

MAGGIE. Is this Lamb's Hotel? Put me on to the Comtesse de la Brière, please.

SYBIL (*with a sinking*). What do you want with auntie?

MAGGIE. Her cottage in the country would be the very place. She invited John and me.

JOHN. Yes, but—

MAGGIE (*arguing*). And Mr. Venables is to be there. Think of the impression you could make on *him,* seeing him daily for three weeks.

JOHN. There's something in that.

MAGGIE. Is it you, Comtesse? I'm Maggie Shand.

SYBIL. You are not to tell her that—?

MAGGIE. No. (*To the* COMTESSE) Oh, I'm very well, never was better. Yes, yes; you see I can't, because my folk have never been in London before, and I must take them about and show them the sights. But John could come to you alone; why not?

JOHN (*with proper pride*). If she's not keen to have me, I won't go.

MAGGIE. She's very keen. Comtesse, I could come for a day by and by to see how you are getting on. Yes—yes—certainly. (*To* JOHN) She says she'll be delighted.

JOHN (*thoughtfully*). You're not doing this, Maggie, thinking that my being absent from Sybil for a few weeks can make any difference? Of course it's natural you should want us to keep apart, but—

MAGGIE (*grimly*). I'm founding no hope on keeping you apart, John.

JOHN. It's what other wives would do.

MAGGIE. I promised to be different.

JOHN (*his position as a strong man assured*). Then tell her I accept. (*He wanders back into the dining-room.*)

SYBIL. I think—(*she is not sure what she thinks*)—I think you are very wonderful.

MAGGIE. Was that John calling to you?

SYBIL. Was it? (*She is glad to join him in the dining-room.*)

MAGGIE. Comtesse, hold the line a minute. (*She is alone, and she has nearly reached the end of her self-control. She shakes emotionally and utters painful little cries; there is something she wants to do, and she is loth to do it. But she does it.*) Are you there, Comtesse? There's one other thing, dear Comtesse; I want you to invite Lady Sybil also; yes, for the whole time that John is there. No, I'm not mad; as a great favour to me; yes, I have a very particular reason, but I won't tell you what it is; oh, call me Scotchy as much as you like, but consent; do, do, do. Thank you, thank you, good-bye.

(*She has control of herself now, and is determined not to let it slip from her again. When they reappear the stubborn one is writing a letter.*)

JOHN. I thought I heard the telephone again.

MAGGIE (*looking up from her labours*). It was the Comtesse; she says she's to invite Lady Sybil to the cottage at the same time.

SYBIL. Me!

JOHN. To invite Sybil? Then of course I won't go, Maggie.

MAGGIE (*wondering seemingly at these niceties*). What does it matter? Is anything to be considered except the speech? (*It has been admitted that she was a little devil.*) And, with Sybil on the spot, John, *to help you and inspire you,* what a speech it will be!

JOHN (*carried away*). Maggie, you really are a very generous woman.

SYBIL (*convinced at last*). She is indeed.

JOHN. And you're queer too. How many women in the circumstances would sit down to write a letter!

MAGGIE. It's a letter to you, John.

JOHN. To me?

MAGGIE. I'll give it to you when it's finished, but I ask you not to open it till your visit to the Comtesse ends.

JOHN. What is it about?

MAGGIE. It's practical.

SYBIL (*rather faintly*). Practical? (*She has heard the word so frequently to-day that it is beginning to have a Scotch sound. She feels she ought to like* MAGGIE, *but that she would like her better if they were*

farther apart. She indicates that the doctors are troubled about her heart, and murmuring her adieux she goes. JOHN, *who is accompanying her, pauses at the door.*)

JOHN (*with a queer sort of admiration for his wife*). Maggie, I wish I was fond of you.

MAGGIE (*heartily*). I wish you were, John.

(*He goes, and she resumes her letter. The stocking is lying at hand, and she pushes it to the floor. She is done for a time with knitting.*)

ACT IV

MAN's most pleasant invention is the lawn-mower. All the birds know this, and that is why, when it is at rest, there is always at least one of them sitting on the handle with his head cocked, wondering how the delicious whirring sound is made. When they find out, they will change their note. As it is, you must sometimes have thought that you heard the mower very early in the morning, and perhaps you peeped in *négligé* from your lattice window to see who was up so early. It was really the birds trying to get the note.

On this broiling morning, however, we are at noon, and whoever looks will see that the whirring is done by Mr. Venables. He is in a linen suit with the coat discarded (the bird is sitting on it), and he comes and goes across the Comtesse's lawns, pleasantly mopping his face. We see him through a crooked bowed window generously open, roses intruding into it as if to prevent its ever being closed at night; there are other roses in such armfuls on the tables that one could not easily say where the room ends and the garden begins.

In the Comtesse's pretty comic drawing-room (for she likes the comic touch when she is in England)

sits John Shand with his hostess, on chairs at a great distance from each other. No linen garments for John, nor flannels, nor even knickerbockers; he envies the English way of dressing for trees and lawns, but is too Scotch to be able to imitate it; he wears tweeds, just as he would do in his native country where they would be in kilts. Like many another Scot, the first time he ever saw a kilt was on a Sassenach; indeed kilts were perhaps invented, like golf, to draw the English north. John is doing nothing, which again is not a Scotch accomplishment, and he looks rather miserable and dour. The Comtesse is already at her Patience cards, and occasionally she smiles on him as if not displeased with his long silence. At last she speaks:

COMTESSE. I feel it rather a shame to detain you here on such a lovely day, Mr. Shand, entertaining an old woman.

JOHN. I don't pretend to think I'm entertaining you, Comtesse.

COMTESSE. But you are, you know.

JOHN. I would be pleased to be told how?

(*She shrugs her impertinent shoulders, and presently there is another heavy sigh from* JOHN.)

COMTESSE. Again! Why do not you go out on the river?

JOHN. Yes, I can do that. (*He rises.*)

COMTESSE. And take Sybil with you. (*He sits again.*) No?

JOHN. I have been on the river with her twenty times.

COMTESSE. Then take her for a long walk through the Fairloe woods.

JOHN. We were there twice last week.

COMTESSE. There is a romantically damp little arbour at the end of what the villagers call the Lovers' Lane.

JOHN. One can't go there every day. I see nothing to laugh at.

COMTESSE. Did I laugh? I must have been translating the situation into French.

(*Perhaps the music of the lawn-mower is not to* JOHN'S *mood, for he betakes himself to another room.* MR. VENABLES *pauses in his labours to greet a lady who has appeared on the lawn, and who is* MAGGIE. *She is as neat as if she were one of the army of typists* (*who are quite the nicest kind of women*), *and carries a little bag. She comes in through the window, and puts her hands over the* COMTESSE'S *eyes.*)

COMTESSE. They are a strong pair of hands, at any rate.

MAGGIE. And not very white, and biggish for my size. Now guess.

(*The* COMTESSE *guesses, and takes both the hands in hers as if she valued them. She pulls off* MAGGIE'S *hat as if to prevent her flying away.*)

COMTESSE. Dear abominable one, not to let me know you were coming.

MAGGIE. It is just a surprise visit, Comtesse. I walked up from the station. (*For a moment* MAGGIE *seems to have borrowed* SYBIL'S *impediment*). How is—everybody?

COMTESSE. He is quite well. But, my child, ne seems to me to be a most unhappy man.

(*This sad news does not seem to make a most unhappy woman of the child. The* COMTESSE *is puzzled, as she knows nothing of the situation save what she has discovered for herself.*)

Why should that please you, O heartless one?

MAGGIE. I won't tell you.

COMTESSE. I could take you and shake you, Maggie. Here have I put my house at your disposal for so many days for some sly Scotch purpose, and you will not tell me what it is.

MAGGIE. No.

COMTESSE. Very well, then, but I have what you call a nasty one for you. (*The* COMTESSE *lures* MR. VENABLES *into the room by holding up what might be a foaming glass of lemon squash.*) Alas, Charles, it is but a flower vase. I want you to tell Mrs. Shand what you think of her husband's speech.

(MR. VENABLES *gives his hostess a reproachful look.*)

VENABLES. Eh—ah—Shand will prefer to do that himself. I promised the gardener—I must not disappoint him—excuse me—

COMTESSE. You must tell her, Charles.

MAGGIE. Please, Mr. Venables, I should like to know.

(*He sits down with a sigh and obeys.*)

VENABLES. Your husband has been writing the speech here, and by his own wish he read it to me three days ago. The occasion is to be an important one; and, well, there are a dozen young men in the party at present, all capable of filling a certain small ministerial post. (*He looks longingly at the mower, but it sends no message to his aid.*) And as he is one of them I was anxious that he should show in this speech of what he is capable.

MAGGIE. And hasn't he?

(*Not for the first time* MR. VENABLES *wishes that he was not in politics.*)

VENABLES. I am afraid he has.

COMTESSE. What is wrong with his speech, Charles?

VENABLES. Nothing—and he can still deliver it. It is a powerful, well-thought-out piece of work, such as only a very able man could produce. But it has no *special quality* of its own—none of the little touches

that used to make an old stager like myself want to pat Shand on the shoulder. (*The* COMTESSE's *mouth twitches, but* MAGGIE *declines to notice it.*) He pounds on manfully enough, but, if I may say so, with a wooden leg. It is as good, I dare say, as the rest of them could have done; but they start with such inherited advantages, Mrs. Shand, that he had to do better.

MAGGIE. Yes, I can understand that.

VENABLES. I am sorry, Mrs. Shand, for he interested me. His career has set me wondering whether if *I* had begun as a railway porter I might not still be calling out, 'By your leave.'

(MAGGIE *thinks it probable but not important.*)

MAGGIE. Mr. Venables, now that I think of it, surely John wrote to me that you were dissatisfied with his first speech, and that he was writing another.

(*The* COMTESSE's *eyes open very wide indeed.*)

VENABLES. I have heard nothing of that, Mrs. Shand. (*He shakes his wise head.*) And in any case, I am afraid— (*He still hears the wooden leg.*)

MAGGIE. But you said yourself that his second thoughts were sometimes such an improvement on the first.

(*The* COMTESSE *comes to the help of the baggage.*)

COMTESSE. I remember your saying that, Charles.

VENABLES. Yes, that has struck me. (*Politely*)

Well, if he has anything to show me— In the meantime—

(*He regains the lawn, like one glad to escape attendance at* JOHN'S *obsequies. The* COMTESSE *is brought back to speech by the sound of the mower—nothing wooden in it.*)

COMTESSE. What are you up to now, Miss Pin? You know as well as I do that there is no such speech.

(MAGGIE'S *mouth tightens.*)

MAGGIE. I do not.

COMTESSE. It is a duel, is it, my friend?

(*The* COMTESSE *rings the bell and* MAGGIE'S *guilty mind is agitated.*)

MAGGIE. What are you ringing for?

COMTESSE. As the challenged one, Miss Pin, I have the choice of weapons. I am going to send for your husband to ask him if he has written such a speech. After which, I suppose, *you* will ask me to leave you while you and he write it together.

(MAGGIE *wrings her hands.*)

MAGGIE. You are wrong, Comtesse; but please don't do that.

COMTESSE. You but make me more curious, and my doctor says that I must be told everything. (*The* COMTESSE *assumes the pose of her sex in melodrama.*) Put your cards on the table, Maggie Shand, *or*— (*She indicates that she always pinks her man.* MAGGIE

dolefully produces a roll of paper from her bag.) What precisely is that?

(*The reply is little more than a squeak.*)

MAGGIE. John's speech.

COMTESSE. You have written it yourself!

(MAGGIE *is naturally indignant.*)

MAGGIE. It's typed.

COMTESSE. You guessed that the speech he wrote unaided would not satisfy, and you prepared this to take its place!

MAGGIE. Not at all, Comtesse. It is the draft of his speech that he left at home. That's all.

COMTESSE. With a few trivial alterations by yourself, I swear. Can you deny it?

(*No wonder that* MAGGIE *is outraged. She replaces* JOHN'S *speech in the bag with becoming hauteur.*)

MAGGIE. Comtesse, these insinuations are unworthy of you. May I ask where is my husband?

(*The* COMTESSE *drops her a curtsey.*)

COMTESSE. I believe your Haughtiness may find him in the Dutch garden. Oh, I see through you. You are not to show him your speech. But you are to get him to write another one, and somehow all your additions will be in it. Think not, creature, that you can deceive one so old in iniquity as the Comtesse de la Brière.

(*There can be but one reply from a good wife*

to such a charge, and at once the COMTESSE *is left alone with her shame. Anon a footman appears. You know how they come and go.*)

FOOTMAN. You rang, my lady?

COMTESSE. Did I? Ah, yes, but why? (*He is but lately from the ploughshare and cannot help her. In this quandary her eyes alight upon the bag. She is unfortunately too abandoned to feel her shame; she still thinks that she has the choice of weapons. She takes the speech from the bag and bestows it on her servitor.*) Take this to Mr. Venables, please, and say it is from Mr. Shand. (THOMAS—*but in the end we shall probably call him* JOHN—*departs with the dangerous papers; and when* MAGGIE *returns she finds that the* COMTESSE *is once more engaged on her inrupted game of Patience.*) You did not find him?

(*All the bravery has dropped from* MAGGIE'S *face.*)

MAGGIE. I didn't see him, but I heard him. *She* is with him. I think they are coming here.

(*The* COMTESSE *is suddenly kind again.*)

COMTESSE. Sybil? Shall I get rid of her?

MAGGIE. No, I want her to be here, too. Now I shall know.

(*The* COMTESSE *twists the little thing round.*)

COMTESSE. Know what?

MAGGIE. As soon as I look into his face I shall know.

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(*A delicious scent ushers in the fair* SYBIL, *who is as sweet as a milking stool. She greets* MRS. SHAND *with some alarm.*)

MAGGIE. How do you do, Lady Sybil? How pretty you look in that frock. (SYBIL *rustles uncomfortably.*) You are a feast to the eye.

SYBIL. Please, I wish you would not.

(*Shall we describe* SYBIL'S *frock, in which she looks like a great strawberry that knows it ought to be plucked; or would it be easier to watch the coming of* JOHN? *Let us watch* JOHN.)

JOHN. You, Maggie! You never wrote that you were coming.

(*No, let us watch* MAGGIE. *As soon as she looked into his face she was to know something of importance.*)

MAGGIE (*not dissatisfied with what she sees*). No, John, it's a surprise visit. I just ran down to say good-bye.

(*At this his face falls, which does not seem to pain her.*)

SYBIL (*foreseeing another horrible Scotch scene*). To say good-bye?

COMTESSE (*thrilling with expectation*). To whom, Maggie?

SYBIL (*deserted by the impediment, which is probably playing with rough boys in the Lovers' Lane*). Auntie, do leave us, won't you?

COMTESSE. Not I. It is becoming far too interesting.

MAGGIE. I suppose there's no reason the Comtesse shouldn't be told, as she will know so soon at any rate?

JOHN. That's so. (SYBIL *sees with discomfort that he is to be practical also.*)

MAGGIE. It's so simple. You see, Comtesse, John and Lady Sybil have fallen in love with one another, and they are to go off as soon as the meeting at Leeds has taken place.

(*The* COMTESSE'S *breast is too suddenly introduced to Caledonia and its varied charms.*)

COMTESSE. Mon Dieu!

MAGGIE. I think that's putting it correctly, John.

JOHN. In a sense. But I'm not to attend the meeting at Leeds. My speech doesn't find favour. (*With a strange humility*) There's something wrong with it.

COMTESSE. I never expected to hear you say that, Mr. Shand.

JOHN (*wondering also*). I never expected it myself. I meant to make it the speech of my career. But somehow my hand seems to have lost its cunning.

COMTESSE. And you don't know how?

JOHN. It's inexplicable. My brain was never clearer.

COMTESSE. You might have helped him, Svbil.

SYBIL (*quite sulkily*). I did.

COMTESSE. But I thought she was such an inspiration to you, Mr. Shand.

JOHN (*going bravely to* SYBIL'S *side*). She slaved at it with me.

COMTESSE. Strange. (*Wickedly becoming practical also*) So now there is nothing to detain you. Shall I send for a fly, Sybil?

SYBIL (*with a cry of the heart*). Auntie, do leave us.

COMTESSE. I can understand your impatience to be gone, Mr. Shand.

JOHN (*heavily*). I promised Maggie to wait till the 24th, and I'm a man of my word.

MAGGIE. But I give you back your word, John. You can go now.

(JOHN *looks at* SYBIL, *and* SYBIL *looks at* JOHN, *and the impediment arrives in time to take a peep at both of them.*)

SYBIL (*groping for the practical, to which we must all come in the end*). He must make satisfactory arrangements about you first. I insist on that.

MAGGIE (*with no more imagination than a hen*). Thank you, Lady Sybil, but I have made all my arrangements.

JOHN (*stung*). Maggie, that was my part.

MAGGIE. You see, my brothers feel they can't be

away from their business any longer; and so, if it would be convenient to you, John, I could travel north with them by the night train on Wednesday.

SYBIL. I—I— The way you put things—!

JOHN. This is just the 21st.

MAGGIE. My things are all packed. I think you'll find the house in good order, Lady Sybil. I have had the vacuum cleaners in. I'll give you the keys of the linen and the silver plate; I have them in that bag. The carpet on the upper landing is a good deal frayed, but—

SYBIL. Please, I don't want to hear any more.

MAGGIE. The ceiling of the dining-room would be the better of a new lick of paint—

SYBIL (*stamping her foot, small fours*). Can't you stop her?

JOHN (soothingly). She's meaning well. Maggie, I know it's natural to you to value those things, because your outlook on life is bounded by them; but all this jars on me.

MAGGIE. Does it?

JOHN. Why should you be so ready to go?

MAGGIE. I promised not to stand in your way.

JOHN (*stoutly*). You needn't be in such a hurry. There are three days to run yet. (*The French are so different from us that we shall probably never be able to understand why the* COMTESSE *laughed aloud here.*) It's just a joke to the Comtesse.

COMTESSE. It seems to be no joke to you, Mr. Shand. Sybil, my pet, are you to let him off?

SYBIL (*flashing*). Let him off? If he wishes it. Do you?

JOHN (*manfully*). I want it to go on. (*Something seems to have caught in his throat: perhaps it is the impediment trying a temporary home.*) It's the one wish of my heart. If you come with me, Sybil, I'll do all in a man's power to make you never regret it.

(*Triumph of the Vere de Veres.*)

MAGGIE (*bringing them back to earth with a dump*). And I can make my arrangements for Wednesday?

SYBIL (*seeking the* COMTESSE'S *protection*). No, you can't. Auntie, I am not going on with this. I'm very sorry for you, John, but I see now—I couldn't face it—

(*She can't face anything at this moment except the sofa pillows.*)

COMTESSE (*noticing* JOHN'S *big sigh of relief*). So *that* is all right, Mr. Shand!

MAGGIE. Don't you love her any more, John? Be practical.

SYBIL (*to the pillows*). At any rate I have tired of him. Oh, best to tell the horrid truth. I am ashamed of myself. I have been crying my eyes out over it—I thought I was such a different kind of woman. But I am weary of him. I think him—oh, so dull.

JOHN (*his face lighting up*). Are you sure that is how you have come to think of me?

SYBIL. I'm sorry; (*with all her soul*) but yes—yes—yes—yes.

JOHN. By God, it's more than I deserve.

COMTESSE. Congratulations to you both.

(SYBIL *runs away; and in the fulness of time she married successfully in cloth of silver, which was afterwards turned into a bed-spread.*)

MAGGIE. You haven't read my letter yet, John, have you?

JOHN. No.

COMTESSE (*imploringly*). May I know to what darling letter you refer?

MAGGIE. It's a letter I wrote to him before he left London. I gave it to him closed, not to be opened until his time here was ended.

JOHN (*as his hand strays to his pocket*). Am I to read it now?

MAGGIE. Not before her. Please go away, Comtesse.

COMTESSE. Every word you say makes me more determined to remain.

MAGGIE. It will hurt you, John. (*Distressed*) Don't read it; tear it up.

JOHN. You make me very curious, Maggie. And yet I don't see what can be in it.

COMTESSE. But you feel a little nervous? Give *me* the dagger.

MAGGIE (*quickly*). No. (*But the* COMTESSE *has already got it.*)

COMTESSE. May I? (*She must have thought they said Yes, for she opens the letter. She shares its contents with them.*) 'Dearest John, It is at my request that the Comtesse is having Lady Sybil at the cottage at the same time as yourself.'

JOHN. What?

COMTESSE. Yes, she begged me to invite you together.

JOHN. But why?

MAGGIE. I promised you not to behave as other wives would do.

JOHN. It's not understandable.

COMTESSE. 'You may ask why I do this, John, and my reason is, I think that after a few weeks of Lady Sybil, every day, and all day, you will become sick to death of her. I am also giving her the chance to help you and inspire you with your work, so that you may both learn what her help and her inspiration amount to. Of course, if your love is the great strong passion you think it, then those weeks will make you love her more than ever and I can only say good-bye. But if, as I suspect, you don't even now know what true love is, then by the next time we meet, dear John, you will have had enough of her.—Your affectionate wife, Maggie.' Oh, why was not Sybil present at the reading of the will! And now, if you two will kindly ex-

cuse me, I think I must go and get that poor sufferer the eau de Cologne.

JOHN. It's almost enough to make a man lose faith in himself.

COMTESSE. Oh, don't say that, Mr. Shand.

MAGGIE (*defending him*). You mustn't hurt him. If you haven't loved deep and true, that's just because you have never met a woman yet, John, capable of inspiring it.

COMTESSE (*putting her hand on* MAGGIE'S *shoulder*). Have you not, Mr. Shand?

JOHN. I see what you mean. But Maggie wouldn't think better of me for any false pretences. She knows my feelings for her now are neither more nor less than what they have always been.

MAGGIE (*who sees that he is looking at her as solemnly as a volume of sermons printed by request*). I think no one could be fond of me that can't laugh a little at me.

JOHN. How could that help?

COMTESSE (*exasperated*). Mr. Shand, I give you up.

MAGGIE. I admire his honesty.

COMTESSE. Oh, I give you up also. Arcades ambo. Scotchies both.

JOHN (*when she has gone*). But this letter, it's not like you. By Gosh, Maggie, you're no fool.

(*She beams at this, as any wife would.*)

But how could I have made such a mistake? It's not like a strong man. (*Evidently he has an inspiration.*)

MAGGIE. What is it?

JOHN (*the inspiration*). *Am* I a strong man?

MAGGIE. You? Of course you are. And self-made. Has anybody ever helped you in the smallest way?

JOHN (*thinking it out again*). No, nobody.

MAGGIE. Not even Lady Sybil?

JOHN. I'm beginning to doubt it. It's very curious, though, Maggie, that this speech should be disappointing.

MAGGIE. It's just that Mr. Venables hasn't the brains to see how good it is.

JOHN. That must be it. (*But he is too good a man to rest satisfied with this.*) No, Maggie, it's not. Somehow I seem to have lost my neat way of saying things.

MAGGIE (*almost cooing*). It will come back to you.

JOHN (*forlorn*). If you knew how I've tried.

MAGGIE (*cautiously*). Maybe if you were to try again; and I'll just come and sit beside you, and knit. I think the click of the needles sometimes put you in the mood.

JOHN. Hardly that; and yet many a Shandism have I knocked off while you were sitting beside me knitting. I suppose it was the quietness.

MAGGIE. Very likely.

JOHN (*with another inspiration*). Maggie!

MAGGIE (*again*). What is it, John?

JOHN. What if it was you that put those queer ideas into my head!

MAGGIE. Me?

JOHN. Without your knowing it, I mean.

MAGGIE. But how?

JOHN. We used to talk bits over; and it may be that you dropped the seed, so to speak.

MAGGIE. John, could it be this, that I sometimes had the idea in a rough womanish sort of way and then you polished it up till it came out a Shandism?

JOHN (*slowly slapping his knee*). I believe you've hit it, Maggie: to think that you may have been helping me all the time—and neither of us knew it!

(*He has so nearly reached a smile that no one can say what might have happened within the next moment if the* COMTESSE *had not reappeared.*)

COMTESSE. Mr. Venables wishes to see you, Mr. Shand.

JOHN (*lost, stolen, or strayed a smile in the making*). Hum!

COMTESSE. He is coming now.

JOHN (*grumpy*). Indeed!

COMTESSE (*sweetly*). It is about your speech.

JOHN. He has said all he need say on that subject, and more.

COMTESSE (*quaking a little*). I think it is about the second speech.

JOHN. What second speech?

(MAGGIE *runs to her bag and opens it.*)

MAGGIE (*horrified*). Comtesse, you have given it to him!

COMTESSE (*impudently*). Wasn't I meant to?

JOHN. What is it? What second speech?

MAGGIE. Cruel, cruel. (*Willing to go on her knees.*) You had left the first draft of your speech at home, John, and I brought it here with—with a few little things I've added myself.

JOHN (*a seven-footer*). What's that?

MAGGIE (*four foot ten at most*). Just trifles—things I was to suggest to you—while I was knitting—and then, if you liked any of them you could have polished them—and turned them into something good. John, John—and now she has shown it to Mr. Venables.

JOHN (*thundering*). As my work, Comtesse?

(*But the* COMTESSE *is not of the women who are afraid of thunder.*)

MAGGIE. It is your work—nine-tenths of it.

JOHN (*in the black cap*). You presumed, Maggie Shand! Very well, then, here he comes, and now we'll see to what extent you've helped me.

VENABLES. My dear fellow. My dear Shand, I congratulate you. Give me your hand.

JOHN. The speech?

VENABLES. You have improved it out of knowledge. It is the same speech, but those new touches make all the difference. (JOHN *sits down heavily.*) Mrs. Shand, be proud of him.

MAGGIE. I am. I am, John.

COMTESSE. You always said that his second thoughts were best, Charles.

VENABLES (*pleased to be reminded of it*). Didn't I, didn't I? Those delicious little touches! How good that is, Shand, about the flowing tide.

COMTESSE. The flowing tide?

VENABLES. In the first speech it was something like this—'Gentlemen, the Opposition are calling to you to vote for them and the flowing tide, but I solemnly warn you to beware lest the flowing tide does not engulf you.' The second way is much better.

COMTESSE. What is the second way, Mr. Shand?

(JOHN *does not tell her.*)

VENABLES. This is how he puts it now. (JOHN *cannot help raising his head to listen.*) 'Gentlemen, the Opposition are calling to you to vote for them and the flowing tide, but I ask you cheerfully to vote for us and *dam* the flowing tide.'

(VENABLES *and his old friend the* COMTESSE *laugh heartily, but for different reasons.*)

COMTESSE. It *is* better, Mr. Shand.

MAGGIE. *I* don't think so.

VENABLES. Yes, yes, it's so virile. Excuse me, Com-

tesse, I'm off to read the whole thing again. (*For the first time he notices that* JOHN *is strangely quiet.*) I think this has rather bowled you over, Shand.

(JOHN'S *head sinks lower.*)

Well, well, good news doesn't kill.

MAGGIE (*counsel for the defence*). Surely the important thing about the speech is its strength and knowledge and eloquence, the things that were in the first speech as well as in the second.

VENABLES. That of course is largely true. The wit would not be enough without them, just as they were not enough without the wit. It is the combination that is irresistible. (JOHN'S *head rises a little.*) Shand, you are our man, remember that, it is emphatically the best thing you have ever done. How this will go down at Leeds!

(*He returns gaily to his hammock; but lower sinks* JOHN'S *head, and even the* COMTESSE *has the grace to take herself off.* MAGGIE'S *arms flutter near her husband, not daring to light.*)

MAGGIE. You heard what he said, John. It's the combination. Is it so terrible to you to find that my love for you had made me able to help you in the little things?

JOHN. The little things! It seems strange to me to hear you call me by my name, Maggie. It's as if I looked on you for the first time.

MAGGIE. Look at me, John, for the first time. What do you see?

JOHN. I see a woman who has brought her husband low.

MAGGIE. Only that?

JOHN. I see the tragedy of a man who has found himself out. Eh, I can't live with you again, Maggie.

(*He shivers.*)

MAGGIE. Why did you shiver, John?

JOHN. It was at myself for saying that I couldn't live with you again, when I should have been wondering how for so long you have lived with me. And I suppose you have forgiven me all the time. (*She nods.*) And forgive me still? (*She nods again.*) Dear God!

MAGGIE. John, am I to go? or are you to keep me on? (*She is now a little bundle near his feet.*) I'm willing to stay because I'm useful to you, if it can't be for a better reason. (*His hand feels for her, and the bundle wriggles nearer.*) It's nothing unusual I have done, John. Every man who is high up loves to think that he has done it all himself; and the wife smiles, and lets it go at that. It's our only joke. Every woman knows that. (*He stares at her in hopeless perplexity.*) Oh, John, if only you could laugh at me.

JOHN. I can't laugh, Maggie.

(*But as he continues to stare at her a strange disorder appears in his face.* MAGGIE *feels that it is to be now or never.*)

MAGGIE. Laugh, John, laugh. Watch me; see how easy it is.

(*A terrible struggle is taking place within him. He creaks. Something that may be mirth forces a passage, at first painfully, no more joy in it than in the discoloured water from a spring that has long been dry. Soon, however, he laughs loud and long. The spring water is becoming clear.* MAGGIE *claps her hands. He is saved.*)

ALICE SIT-BY-THE-FIRE

ACT I

One would like to peep covertly into Amy's diary (octavo, with the word 'Amy' in gold letters wandering across the soft brown leather covers, as if it was a long word and, in Amy's opinion, rather a dear). To take such a liberty, and allow the reader to look over our shoulders, as they often invite you to do in novels (which, however, are much more coquettish things than plays), would be very helpful to us; we should learn at once what sort of girl Amy is, and why to-day finds her washing her hair. We should also get proof or otherwise, that we are interpreting her aright; for it is our desire not to record our feelings about Amy, but merely Amy's feelings about herself; not to tell what we think happened, but what Amy thought happened. The book, to be sure, is padlocked, but we happen to know where it is kept. (In the lower drawer of that hand-painted escritoire.) Sometimes in the night Amy, waking up, wonders whether she did lock her diary, and steals downstairs in white to make sure. On these occasions she undoubtedly lingers among the pages, re-reading the peculiarly delightful bit she wrote yesterday; so we could peep over her shoulder, while the reader peeps over ours. Then why don't we do it? Is it because this would be a form of eavesdropping, and that

we cannot be sure our hands are clean enough to turn the pages of a young girl's thoughts? It cannot be that, because the novelists do it. It is because in a play we must tell little that is not revealed by the spoken words; you must ferret out all you want to know from them, although of course now and then we may whisper a conjecture in brackets; there is no weather even in plays except in melodrama; the novelist can have sixteen chapters about the hero's grandparents, but there can be very little rummaging in the past for us; we are expected merely to present our characters as they toe the mark; then the handkerchief falls, and off they go.

So now we know why we must not spy into Amy's diary. Perhaps we have not always been such sticklers for the etiquette of the thing; but we are always sticklers on Thursdays, and this is a Thursday.

As you are to be shown Amy's room, we are permitted to describe it, though not to tell (which would be much more interesting) why a girl of seventeen has, as her very own, the chief room of a house. The moment you open the door of this room (and please, you are not to look consciously at the escritoire as if you knew the diary was in it) you are aware, though Amy may not be visible, that there is an uncommonly clever girl in the house. The door does not always open easily, because attached thereto is a curtain which frequently catches in it, and this curtain

is hand-sewn (extinct animals); indeed a gifted woman's touch is everywhere; if you are not hand-sewn you are almost certainly hand-painted, but incompletely, for Amy in her pursuit of the arts has often to drop one in order to keep pace with another. Some of the chairs have escaped as yet, but their time will come. The table-cover and the curtains are of a lovely pink, perforated ingeniously with many tiny holes, which when you consider them against a dark background, gradually assume the appearance of something pictorial, such as a basket of odd flowers. The fender-stool is in brown velvet, and there are words on it that invite you to sit down. Some of the letters of this message have been burned away. There are artistic white bookshelves hanging lopsidedly here and there, and they also have pink curtains, no larger than a doll's garments. These little curtains are for covering the parts where there are no books as yet. The pictures on the walls are mostly studies done at school, and include the well-known windmill, and the equally popular old lady by the shore. Their frames are of fir-cones, glued together, or of straws which have gone limp, and droop like streaks of macaroni. There is a cosy corner; also a milking-stool, but no cow. The lampshades have had ribbons added to them, and from a distance look like ladies of the ballet. The flower-pot also is in a skirt. Near the door is a large screen, such as people hide behind

in the more ordinary sort of play; it will be interesting to see whether we can resist the temptation to hide some one behind it.

A few common weeds rear their profane heads in this innocent garden; for instance a cruet-stand, a basket of cutlery, and a triangular dish of the kind in which the correct confine cheese. They have not strayed here, they live here; indeed this is among other things the dining-room of a modest little house in Brompton made beautiful, or nearly so, by a girl, who has a soul above food and conceals its accessories as far as possible from view, in drawers, even in the waste-paper basket. Not a dish, not a spoon, not a fork, is hand-painted, a sufficient indication of her contempt for them.

Amy is present, but is not seen to the best advantage, for she has been washing her hair, and is now drying it by the fire. Notable among her garments are a dressing-jacket and a towel, and her head is bent so far back over the fire that we see her face nearly upside-down. This is no position in which we can do justice to her undoubted facial charm. Seated near her is her brother Cosmo, a boy of thirteen, in naval uniform. Cosmo is a cadet at Osborne, and properly proud of his station, but just now he looks proud of nothing. He is plunged in gloom. The cause of his woe is a telegram, which he is regarding from all points of the compass, as if in hopes of mak-

ing it send him better news. At last he gives expression to his feelings.

COSMO. All I can say is that if father tries to kiss me, I shall kick him.

(*If* AMY *makes any reply the words arrive upside-down and are unintelligible. The maid announces* MISS DUNBAR. *Then* AMY *rises, brings her head to the position in which they are usually carried; and she and* GINEVRA *look into each other's eyes. They always do this when they meet, though they meet several times a day, and it is worth doing, for what they see in those pellucid pools is love eternal. Thus they loved at school* (*in their last two terms*), *and thus they will love till the grave encloses them. These thoughts, and others even more beautiful, are in their minds as they gaze at each other now. No man will ever be able to say 'Amy,' or to say 'Ginevra,' with such a trill as they are saying it.*)

AMY. Ginevra, my beloved.

GINEVRA. My Amy, my better self.

AMY. My other me. (*There is something almost painful in love like this.*) Are you well, Ginevra?

GINEVRA. Quite well, Amy. (*Heavens, the joy of* AMY *because* GINEVRA *is quite well.*) How did my Amy sleep?

AMY. I had a good night.

(*How happy is* GINEVRA *because* AMY *has had a good night. All this time they have been slowly approaching each other, drawn by a power stronger than themselves. Their intention is to kiss. They do so.* COSMO *snorts, and betakes himself to some other room, his bedroom probably, where a man may be alone with mannish things. The maidens do not resent his rudeness. They know that poor* COSMO'S *time will come, and they are glad to be alone, for they have much to say that is for no other mortal ears. Some of it is sure to go into the diary; indeed if we were to put our ear to the drawer where the diary is we could probably hear its little heart ticking in unison with theirs.*

It is GINEVRA *who speaks first. She is indeed the bolder of the two. She grips* AMY'S *hand.*)

GINEVRA. Amy, shall we go to *another* to-night?

(*This does not puzzle* AMY, *she is prepared for it, her honest grey eyes even tell that she has wanted it, but now that it is come she quails a little.*)

AMY. Another theatre? Ginevra, that would be five in one week.

GINEVRA (*without blanching*). Yes, but it is also only eight in seventeen years.

AMY (*comforted*). And they have taught us so much, haven't they? Until Monday, dear, when we

went to our first real play we didn't know what Life is.

GINEVRA. We were two raw, unbleached school-girls, Amy—absolutely unbleached.

(*It is such a phrase as this that gives* GINEVRA *the moral ascendancy in their discussions.*)

AMY (*looking perhaps a little unbleached even now*). Of course I had my diary, dear, and I do think that, even before Monday, there were things in it of a not wholly ordinary kind.

GINEVRA. Nothing that necessitated your keeping it locked.

AMY. No, I suppose not. You are quite right, Ginevra. But we have made up for lost time. Every night since Monday, including the matinée, has been a revelation.

(*She closes her eyes so that she may see the revelations more clearly. So does* GINEVRA.)

GINEVRA. Amy, that heart-gripping scene when the love-maddened woman visited the *man* in *his* chambers.

AMY. She wasn't absolutely love-maddened, Ginevra; she really loved her husband best all the time.

GINEVRA. Not till the last act, darling.

AMY. Please don't say it, Ginevra. She was most foolish, especially in the crêpe de chine, but *we* know that she only went to the man's chambers to get back her letters. How I trembled for her then.

GINEVRA. I was strangely calm.

AMY. Oh, Ginevra, I had such a presentiment that the husband would call at those chambers while she was there. And he did. Ginevra, you remember his knock upon the door. Surely you trembled then?

(GINEVRA *knits her lips triumphantly.*)

GINEVRA. Not even then, Amy. Somehow I felt sure that in the nick of time her lady friend would step out from somewhere and say that the letters were hers.

AMY. Nobly compromising herself, Ginevra.

GINEVRA. Amy, how I love that bit where she says so unexpectedly, with noble self-renunciation, 'He is my affianced husband.'

AMY. Isn't it glorious! Strange, Ginevra, that it happened in each play.

GINEVRA. That was because we always went to the thinking theatres. Real plays are always about a lady and two men; and alas, only one of them is her husband. That is Life, you know. It is called the odd, odd triangle.

AMY. Yes, I know. (*Appealingly*) Ginevra, I hope it wasn't wrong of me to go. A month ago I was only a school-girl.

GINEVRA. We both were.

AMY. Yes, but you are now an art student, in lodgings, with a latch-key of your own; you have no one

dependent on you, while I have a brother and sister to—to form.

GINEVRA. You must leave it to the Navy, dear, to form Cosmo, if it can; and as the sister is only a baby, time enough to form her when she can exit from her pram.

AMY. I am in a mother's place for the time being, Ginevra.

GINEVRA. Even mothers go to thinking theatres.

AMY. Whether mine does, Ginevra, I don't even know. This is a very strange position I'm in, awaiting the return from India of parents I have not seen since I was twelve years old. I don't even know if they will like the house. The rent is as they told me to give, but perhaps my scheme of decoration won't appeal to them; they may think my housekeeping has been defective, and may not make allowance for my being so new to it.

GINEVRA. My ownest Amy, if they are not both on their knees to you for the noble way in which you have striven to prepare this house for them—

AMY. Darling Ginevra, all I ask is to be allowed to do my duty.

GINEVRA. Listen, then, Amy: your duty is to be able to help your parents in every way when they return. Your mother having been so long in India can know little about Life; how sweet, then, for you to be able to place your knowledge at her feet.

AMY. I had thought of that, dearest.

GINEVRA. Then, Amy, it would be simply wrong of us not to go to another theatre to-night. I have three and ninepence, so that if you can scrape together one and threepence—

AMY. Generous girl, it can't be.

GINEVRA. Why not?

(*The return of* COSMO *handling the telegram more pugnaciously than ever provides the answer.*)

AMY. Cosmo, show Miss Dunbar the telegram.

GINEVRA (*reading*). 'Boat arrived Southampton this morning.'

AMY. A day earlier than they expected.

COSMO (*darkly*). It's the other bit I am worrying about.

GINEVRA (*reading*). 'Hope to reach our pets this afternoon. Kisses from both to all. Deliriously excited. Mummy and Dad.'

COSMO. Pets, kisses! What can the telegraph people think?

AMY. Surely you want to kiss your mother.

COSMO (*stoutly*). I'm going to kiss her. I mean to do it. It's father I am worrying about; with his 'kisses from *both* to *all*.' All I can say is that, if father comes slobbering over me, I'll surprise him.

(*Here the outer door slams, and the three start*

to their feet as if Philippi had dawned. To COSMO *the slam sounds uncommonly like a father's kiss. He immediately begins to rehearse the greeting which is meant to ward off the fatal blow. 'How are you, father? I'm glad to see you, father; it's a long journey from India; won't you sit down?'*

AMY (*first to recover*). How silly of us, it is only nurse with baby.

(*Presumably what we hear is a perambulator backing into its stall in the passage. Then nurse is distinctly heard in the adjoining room, and we may gather that this is for the nonce the nursery of the house, though to most occupants it would be the back dining-room. There is a door between the two rooms, and* COSMO, *peeping through a chink in it, sounds to his fellow-conspirators the All's Well.*

AMY. Poor nurse, I suppose I had better show her the telegram. She is sure to cry. She looks upon mother as a thief who has come to steal baby from her.

(GINEVRA *wags her head to indicate that this is another slice of Life; and* NURSE *being called in is confronted with the telegram. She runs a gamut of emotion without words, implies that she is nobody and must submit, nods humbly, sets her teeth, is both indignant and servile, and*

finally bursts into tears. AMY *tries to comfort her, but gets this terrible answer:*)

NURSE. They will be bringing a black woman to nurse her—a yah-yah, they call them.

(AMY *signs to* GINEVRA, *and* GINEVRA *signs to* AMY. *These two souls perfectly understand each other, and the telegraphy means that it will be better for dear* GINEVRA *to retire for a time to dear* AMY'S *sweet little bedroom.* AMY *slips the diary into the hand of* GINEVRA, *who pops upstair with it to read the latest instalment.* NURSE *rambles on.*)

NURSE. I have had her for seventeen months. She was just two months old, the angel, when they sent her to England, and she has been mine ever since. The most of them has one look for their mammas and one look for their nurse, but she knew no better than to have both looks for me. (*She returns to the nursery, wailing 'My reign is over.'*)

COSMO. Do you think Molly *will* chuck nurse for mother?

AMY (*experienced*). It is the way of children.

COSMO. Shabby little beasts.

AMY. You mustn't say that, Cosmo; but still it is hard on nurse. Of course (*with swimming eyes*) in a sense it's hard on all of us—I mean to be expecting parents in these circumstances. There must be almost the same feeling of strangeness in the house as when it is a baby that is expected.

COSMO (*gloomily*). I suppose it is a bit like that. Great Scott, Amy, it can't be quite so bad as that.

(AMY, *who is of a very affectionate nature, is glad to have the comfort of his hand.*)

AMY. What do we really know about mother, Cosmo?

(*They are perhaps a touching pair.*)

COSMO. There are her letters.

AMY. Can one know a person by letters? Does she know you, Cosmo, by your letters to her, saying that your motto is 'something attempted, something done to earn a night's repose,' and so on.

COSMO. Well, I thought that would please her.

AMY. Perhaps in her letters she says things just to please us.

(COSMO *wriggles.*)

COSMO. This is pretty low of you, damping a fellow when he was trying to make the best of it.

AMY. All I want you to feel, is that as brother and sister, we are allies, you know—against the unknown.

COSMO. Yes, Amy.

AMY. I want to say, dear, that I'm very sorry I used to shirk bowling to you.

COSMO. That's nothing. I know what girls are. Amy, it's all right, I really am fond of you.

AMY. I have tried to be a sort of mother to you, Cosmo.

COSMO. My socks and things—I know. (*Return-*

ing anxiously to the greater question) Amy, do we know anything of them at all?

AMY. We know some cold facts, of course. We know that father is much older than mother.

COSMO. I can't understand why such an old chap should be so keen to kiss me.

AMY (*in a low voice*). Mother is forty.

COSMO (*in a still lower voice*). I thought she was almost more than forty.

AMY. Don't be so ungenerous, Cosmo. Of course we must be prepared to see her look older.

COSMO. Why?

AMY. She will be rather yellow, coming from India, you know. They will both be a little yellow.

(*They exchange forlorn glances.*)

COSMO (*manfully*). We shan't be any the less fond of them for that, Amy.

AMY. No, indeed.

(*He has an inspiration.*)

COSMO. Do you think we should have these yellow flowers in the room? They might feel—eh?

AMY. How thoughtful of you, dear. I shall remove them at once. After all, Cosmo, we seem to know a good deal about them; and then we know some other things by heredity.

COSMO. Heredity? That's drink, isn't it?

AMY. No, you boy! It's something in a play. It means that if we know ourselves well, we know our

parents also. From thinking of myself, Cosmo, I know mother. In her youth she was one who did not love easily; but when she loved once it was for aye. A nature very difficult to understand, but profoundly interesting. I can feel her *within me,* as she was when she walked down the aisle on that strong arm, to honour and obey him henceforth for aye. What cared they that they had to leave their native land, they were together for aye. And so—

(*Her face is flushed.* COSMO *interrupts selfishly.*)

COSMO. What about father?

AMY. Very nice, unless you mention rupees to him. You see the pensions of all Indian officers are paid in rupees, which means that for every 2s. due to them they get only 1s. 4d. If you mention rupees to any one of them he flares up like a burning paper.

COSMO. I know. I shall take care. But what would you say he was like by heredity?

AMY. Quiet, unassuming, yet of an intensely proud nature. One who if he was deceived would never face his fellow-creatures, but would bow his head before the wind and die. A strong man.

COSMO. Do you mean, Amy, that he takes all that from me?

AMY. I mean that is the sort of man *my* mother would love.

COSMO. Yes, but he is just as likely to kiss me as ever.

(*The return of* GINEVRA *makes him feel that this room is no place for him.*)

COSMO. I think I'll go and walk up and down outside, and have a look at them as they're getting out of the cab. My plan, you see, is first to kiss mother. Then I've made up four things to say to father, and it's after I've said them that the awkward time will come. So then I say, 'I wonder what is in the evening papers'; and out I slip, and when I come back you will all have settled down to ordinary life, same as other people. That's my plan.

(*He goes off, not without hope, and* GINEVRA *shrugs her shoulders forgivingly.*)

GINEVRA. How strange boys are. Have you any 'plan,' Amy?

AMY. Only this, dear Ginevra, to leap into my mother's arms.

(GINEVRA *lifts what can only be called a trouser leg, because that is what it is, though they are very seldom seen alone.*)

GINEVRA. What is this my busy bee is making?

AMY. It's a gentleman's leg. You hand-sew them and stretch them over a tin cylinder, and they are then used as umbrella stands. *Art in the Home* says they are all the rage.

GINEVRA. Oh, Amy, *Boudoir Gossip* says they have quite gone out.

AMY. Again! Every art decoration I try goes out before I have time to finish it.

(*She remembers the diary.*)

Did my Ginevra like my new page?

GINEVRA. Dearest, that is what I came down to speak about. You forgot to give me the key.

AMY. Ginevra, can you ever forgive me? Let us go up and read it together.

(*With arms locked they seek the seclusion of* AMY'S *bedroom.* COSMO *rushes in to tell them that there is a suspicious-looking cab coming down the street, but finding the room empty he departs again to reconnoitre. A cab draws up, a bell rings, and soon we hear the voice of* COLONEL GREY. *He can talk coherently to* FANNY, *he can lend a hand in dumping down his luggage in the passage, he can select from a handful of silver wherewith to pay his cabman: all impossible deeds to his* ALICE, *who would drop the luggage on your toes and cast all the silver at your face rather than be kept another minute from her darlings. 'Where are they?' she has evidently cried just before we see her, and* FANNY *has made a heartless response, for it is a dejected* ALICE *that appears in the doorway of the room.*)

ALICE (*woefully*). *All* out! even—even baby?

FANNY. Yes, ma'am.

(*The poor mother, who had entered the house*

like a whirlwind, subsides into a chair. Her arms fall empty by her side: a moment ago she had six of them, a pair for each child. She cries a little, and when ALICE *cries, which is not often for she is more given to laughter, her face screws up like* MOLLY'S *rather than like* AMY'S. *She is very unlike the sketch of her lately made by the united fancies of her son and daughter; and she will dance them round the room many times before they know her better.* AMY *will never be so pretty as her mother,* COSMO *will never be so gay, and it will be years before either of them is as young. But it is quite a minute before we suspect this; we must look the other way while the* COLONEL *dries her tears. He is quite a grizzled veteran, and is trying hard to pretend that having done without his children for so many years, a few minutes more is no great matter. His adorable* ALICE *is this man's one joke. Some of those furrows in his brow have come from trying to understand her, he owes the agility of his mind to trying to keep up with her, the humorous twist in his mouth is the result of chuckling over her.*)

ALICE (*fluttering across the room*). Robert, I dare say my Amy painted that table!

FANNY. Yes, ma'am, she did.

ALICE. Robert, Amy's table!

COLONEL. Yes, but keep cool, memsahib.

FANNY. I suppose, ma'am, I'm to take my orders from you now.

ALICE (*so timidly that* FANNY *is encouraged to be bold*). I suppose so.

FANNY. The poor miss! it will be a bit trying for her just at first.

(ALICE *is taken aback.*)

ALICE. I hadn't thought of that, Robert.

(ROBERT *thinks it time to take command.*)

COLONEL. Fiddle-de-dee. Bring your mistress a cup of tea, my girl.

FANNY. Yes, sir. Here is the tea-caddy, ma'am. I can't take the responsibility; but this is the key.

ALICE (*falteringly*). Robert, I daren't break into Amy's caddy. She mightn't like it. I can wait.

COLONEL. Rubbish. Give me the key. (*Even* FANNY *cannot but admire the* COLONEL *as he breaks into the caddy.*) That makes me feel I'm master of my own house already. Don't stare at me, girl, as if I was a housebreaker.

(FANNY *goes.*)

ALICE. I feel that is just what we both are! (*In another moment rapturous*) It's home, home! India done, home begun.

(*He is as glad as she.*)

COLONEL. Home, memsahib. And we've never

had a real one before. Thank God, I'm able to give it you at last.

(*She darts impulsively from one object in the room to another.*)

ALICE. Look, these pictures! I'm sure they are all Amy's work. They are splendid. (*With perhaps a moment's misgiving*) Aren't they?

COLONEL (*guardedly*). *I* couldn't have done them. (*He considers the hand-painted curtains.*) She seems to have stopped everything in the middle. Still, I couldn't have done them. I expect this is what is called a cosy corner.

(*But* ALICE *has found something more precious. She utters little cries of rapture.*)

COLONEL. What is it?

ALICE. Oh, Robert, a baby's shoe! My baby. (*She presses it to her as if it were a dove. Then she is appalled.*) Robert, if I had met my baby coming along the street I shouldn't have known her from other people's babies.

COLONEL. Yes, you would. Don't break down now. Just think, Alice, after to-day, you will know your baby anywhere.

ALICE. Oh joy, joy, joy!

(*Then the expression of her face changes to 'Oh woe, woe, woe.'*)

COLONEL. What is it now, Alice?

ALICE. Perhaps she won't like me.

COLONEL. Impossible.

ALICE. Perhaps none of them will like me.

COLONEL. My dear Alice, children always love their mother, whether they see much of her or not. It's an instinct.

ALICE. Who told you that?

COLONEL. You goose. It was yourself.

ALICE. I've lost faith in it.

(*He thinks it wise to sound a warning note.*)

COLONEL. Of course you must give them a little time.

ALICE. Robert, Robert! Not another minute. That's not the way people ever love me. They mustn't think me over first or anything of that sort. If they do I'm lost; they must love me at once.

COLONEL. A good many have done that. (*Surveying her quizzically as if she were one of* AMY'S *incompleted works.*)

ALICE. You are not implying, Robert, that I ever—If I ever did I always told you about it afterwards, didn't I? And I *certainly* never did it until I was sure you were comfortable.

COLONEL. You always wrapped me up first.

ALICE. They were only boys, Robert—poor lonely boys. What are you looking so solemn about?

COLONEL. I was trying to picture you as you will be when you settle down.

ALICE (*properly abashed*). Not settled down yet—

with a girl nearly grown up. And yet it's true; it's the tragedy of Alice Grey. (*She pulls his hair.*) Oh, husband, when shall I settle down?

COLONEL. I can tell you exactly—in a year from to-day. Alice, when I took you away to that humdrummy Indian station I was already quite a middle-aged bloke. I chuckled over your gaiety, but it gave me lumbago to try to be gay with you. Poor old girl, you were like an only child who has to play alone. When for one month in the twelve we went to—to—where the boys were, it was like turning you loose in a sweet-stuff shop.

ALICE. Robert, darling, what nonsense you do talk.

COLONEL (*making rather a wry face*). I didn't always like it, memsahib. But I knew my dear, and could trust her; and I often swore to myself when I was shaving, 'I won't ask her to settle down until I have given her a year in England.' A year from to-day, you harum-scarum. By that time your daughter will be almost grown up herself; and it wouldn't do to let her pass you.

ALICE. Robert, here is an idea; she and I shall come of age together. I promise; or I shall try to keep one day in front of her, like the school-mistresses when they are teaching boys Latin. Dearest, you haven't been disappointed in me as a whole, have you? I haven't paid you for all your dear kindnesses to me —in rupees, have I?

(*His answer is of no consequence, for at this moment there arrives a direct message from heaven. It comes by way of the nursery, and is a child's cry. The heart of* ALICE GREY *stops beating for several seconds. Then it says, 'My Molly!' The* NURSE *appears and is at once on the defensive.*)

NURSE. Is it—Mrs. Grey?

ALICE (*hastily*). Yes. Is my—child in there?

NURSE. Yes, ma'am.

COLONEL (*ready to catch her if she falls*). Alice, be calm.

ALICE (*falteringly*). May I go in, nurse?

NURSE (*cold-heartedly*). She's sleeping, ma'am, and I have made it a rule to let her wake up naturally. But I dare say it's a bad rule.

ALICE (*her hands on her heart*). I'm sure it's a good rule. I shan't wake her, nurse.

COLONEL (*showing the stuff he is made of*). Gad, *I* will. It's the least she can do to let herself be wakened.

ALICE (*admiring the effrontery of the man*). Don't interfere, Robert.

COLONEL. Sleeping? Why, she cried just now.

NURSE. That is why I came out—to see who was making so much noise.

(*An implacable woman this, and yet when she is alone with* MOLLY *a very bundle of delight.*)

I'm vexed when she cries—I dare say it's old-fash-

ioned of me. Not being a yah-yah I'm at a disadvantage.

ALICE (*swelling*). After all, she is *my* child.

COLONEL (*firmly*). Come along, Alice.

ALICE. I would prefer to go alone, dear.

COLONEL. All right. But break it to her that I'm kicking my heels outside.

(ALICE *gets as far as the door. The* NURSE *discharges a last duty.*)

NURSE. You won't touch her, ma'am; she doesn't like to be touched by strangers.

ALICE. Strangers!

COLONEL. Really, nurse.

ALICE. It's quite true.

NURSE. She's an angel if you have the right way with her.

ALICE. Robert, if I shouldn't have the right way with her!

COLONEL. You!

(*But the woman has scored again.*)

ALICE (*willing to go on her knees*). Nurse, what sort of a way does she like from strangers?

NURSE. She's not fond of a canoodlin' way.

ALICE (*faintly*). Is she not?

(*She departs to face her child, and the natural enemy follows her, after giving* COLONEL GREY *a moment in which to discharge her if he dares,*

that is if he wishes to see his baby wither and die. One may as well say here that NURSE *weathered this and many another gale, and remained in the house for many years to be its comfort and its curse.*

FANNY, *with the tea-tray, comes and goes without the* COLONEL'S *being aware of her presence. He merely knows that he has waved some one away. The fact is that the* COLONEL *is engrossed in a rather undignified pursuit. He is listening avidly at the nursery door, and is thus discovered by another member of his family who has entered cautiously. This is* MASTER COSMO, *who, observing the tea-tray, has the happy notion of interposing it between himself and his father's possible osculatory intentions. He lifts the tray, and thus armed introduces himself.*)

COSMO. Hallo, father!

(*His father leaves the door and strides to him.*)

COLONEL. Is it—it's Cosmo.

COSMO (*with the tray well to the fore*). I'm awfully glad to see you—it's a long way from India.

COLONEL. Put that down, my boy, and let me get hold of you.

COSMO (*ingratiatingly*). Have some tea, father.

COLONEL. Put it down.

(COSMO *does so, and prepares for the worst. The* COLONEL *takes both his hands.*)

Let's have a look at you. So this is you.

(*He waggles his head, well pleased, while* COSMO *backs in a gentlemanly manner.*)

COSMO (*implying that this first meeting is now an affair of the past*). Has Mother gone to lie down?

COLONEL. Lie down? She's in there.

(COSMO *steals to the nursery door and softly closes it.*)

Why do you do that?

COSMO. I don't know. I thought it would be—best. (*In a burst of candour*) This is not the way I planned it, you see.

COLONEL. Our meeting? So you've been planning it? My dear fellow, I was planning it too, and my plan—

(*He is certainly coming closer.*)

COSMO (*hurriedly*). Yes, I know. Now that's over—our first meeting, I mean; now we settle down.

COLONEL. Not yet. Come here, my boy.

(*He draws him to a chair; he evidently thinks that a father and his boy of thirteen can sit in the same chair.* COSMO *is burning to be pleasant, but of course there are limits.*)

COSMO. Look here, father. Of course, you see—ways change. I dare say they did it, when you were a boy, but it isn't done now.

COLONEL. What isn't done, you dear fellow?

COSMO. Oh—well!—and then taking both hands

and saying 'Dear fellow'—It's gone out, you know.

(*The* COLONEL *chuckles and forbears.*)

COLONEL. I'm uncommon glad you told me, Cosmo. Not having been a father for so long, you see, I'm rather raw at it.

COSMO (*relieved*). That's all right. You'll soon get the hang of it.

COLONEL. If you could give me any other tips?

COSMO (*becoming confidential*). Well, there's my beastly name. Of course you didn't mean any harm when you christened me Cosmo, but—I always sign myself 'C. Grey'—to make the fellows think I'm Charles.

COLONEL. Do they call you that?

COSMO. Lord, no, they call me Grey.

COLONEL. And do you want me to call you Grey?

COSMO (*magnanimously*). No, I don't expect that. But I thought that before people, you know, you needn't call me anything. If you want to attract my attention you could just say 'Hst!'—like that.

COLONEL. Right you are. But you won't make your mother call you Hst?

COSMO (*sagaciously*). Oh no—of course women are different.

COLONEL. You'll be very nice to her, Cosmo? She had to pinch and save more than I should have allowed—to be able to send you into the navy. We are poor people, you know.

COSMO. I've been planning how to be nice to her.

COLONEL. Good lad. Good lad.

(COSMO *remembers his conversation with* AMY, *and thoughtfully hides the 'yellow flowers' behind a photograph. This may be called one of his plans for being nice to mother.*)

COSMO. You don't have your medals here, father?

COLONEL. No, I don't carry them about. But your mother does, the goose. They are not very grand ones, Cosmo.

COSMO (*true blue*). Yes, they are.

(*An awkward silence falls. The* COLONEL *has so much to say that he can only look it. He looks it so eloquently that* COSMO's *fears return. He summons the plan to his help.*)

I wonder what is in the evening papers. If you don't mind, I'll cut out and get one.

(*Before he can cut out, however,* ALICE *is in the room, the picture of distress. No wonder, for even we can hear the baby howling.*)

ALICE (*tragically*). My baby. Robert, listen; that is how I affect her.

(COSMO *cowers unseen.*)

COLONEL. No, no, darling, it isn't you who have made her cry. She—she is teething. It's her teeth, isn't it? (*He barks at the nurse, who emerges looking not altogether woeful.*) Say it's her teeth, woman.

NURSE (*taking this as a reflection on her charge*). She had her teeth long ago.

ALICE (*the forlorn*). The better to bite me with.

NURSE (*complacently*). I don't understand it. She is usually the best-tempered lamb—as you may see for yourself, sir.

(*It is an invitation that the* COLONEL *is eager to accept, but after one step toward the nursery he is true to* ALICE.)

COLONEL. I *decline* to see her. I refuse to have anything to do with her till she comes to a more reasonable frame of mind.

(*The* NURSE *retires, to convey possibly this ultimatum to her charge.*)

ALICE (*in the noblest spirit of self-abnegation*). Go, Robert. Perhaps she—will like you better.

COLONEL. She's a contemptible child.

(*But that nursery door does draw him strongly. He finds himself getting nearer and nearer to it. 'I'll show her,' with a happy pretence that his object is merely to enforce discipline. The forgotten* COSMO *pops up again; the* COLONEL *introduces him with a gesture and darts off to his baby.*)

ALICE (*entranced*). My son!

COSMO (*forgetting all plans*). Mother!

(*She envelops him in her arms, worshipping him, and he likes it.*)

ALICE. Oh, Cosmo—how splendid you are!

COSMO (*soothingly*). That's all right, mother.

ALICE. Say it again.

COSMO. That's all right.

ALICE. No, the other word.

COSMO. Mother.

ALICE. Again.

COSMO. Mother—mother— (*When she has come to*) Are you better now?

ALICE. He is my son, and he is in uniform.

COSMO (*aware that allowances must be made*). Yes, I know.

ALICE. Are you glad to see your mother, Cosmo?

COSMO. Rather. Will you have some tea?

ALICE. No, no, I feel I can do nothing for the rest of my life but hug my glorious boy.

COSMO. Of course, I have my work.

ALICE. His work! Do the officers love you, Cosmo?

COSMO (*degraded*). Love me! I should think not.

ALICE. I should like to ask them all to come and stay with us.

COSMO (*appalled*). Great Scott, mother, you can't do things like that.

ALICE. Can't I? Are you very studious, Cosmo?

COSMO (*neatly*). My favourite authors are William Shakespeare and William Milton. They are grand, don't you think?

ALICE. I'm only a woman, you see; and I'm afraid

they sometimes bore me, especially William Milton.

COSMO (*with relief*). Do they? Me, too.

ALICE (*on the verge of tears again*). But not half so much as I bore my baby.

COSMO (*anxious to help her*). What did you do to her?

ALICE (*appealingly*). I couldn't help wanting to hold her in my arms, could I, Cosmo?

COSMO (*full of consideration*). No, of course you couldn't. (*He reflects.*) How did you take hold of her?

ALICE. I suppose in some clumsy way.

COSMO. Not like this, was it?

ALICE (*gloomily*). I dare say.

COSMO. You should have done it this way.

(*He very kindly shows her how to carry a baby.*)

ALICE (*with becoming humility*). Thank you, Cosmo.

(*He does not observe the gleam in her eye, and is in the high good-humour that comes to any man when any woman asks him to show her how to do anything.*)

COSMO. If you like I'll show you with a cushion. You see this (*scoops it up*) is wrong; but this (*he does a little sleight of hand*) is right. Another way is this, with their head hanging over your shoulder, and you holding on firmly to their legs. You wouldn't think it was comfortable, but they like it.

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ALICE (*adoring him*). I see, Cosmo. (*She practises diligently with the cushion.*) First this way—then this.

COSMO. That's first-class. It's just a knack. You'll soon pick it up.

ALICE (*practising on him instead of the cushion*). You darling boy!

COSMO. I think I hear a boy calling the evening papers.

ALICE (*clinging to him*). Don't go. There can be nothing in the evening papers about what my boy thinks of his mother.

COSMO. Good Lord, no. (*He thinks quickly.*) You haven't seen Amy yet. It isn't fair of Amy. She should have been here to take some of it off me.

ALICE. Cosmo, you don't mean that I bore you too!

(*He is pained. It is now he who boldly encircles her. But his words, though well meant, are not so happy as his action.*)

COSMO. I love you, mother; and *I* don't think you're so yellow.

ALICE (*the belle of many stations*). Yellow? (*Her brain reels.*) Cosmo, do you think me plain?

COSMO (*gallantly*). No, I don't. I'm not one of the kind who judge people by their looks. The soul, you know, is what I judge them by.

ALICE. Plain? Me!

COSMO (*the comforter*). Of course it's all right for girls to bother about being pretty. (*He lures her away from the subject.*) I can tell you a funny thing about that. We had theatricals at Osborne one night, and we played a thing called 'The Royal Boots.'

ALICE (*clapping her hands*). *I* played in that, too, last year.

COSMO. You?

ALICE. Yes. Why shouldn't I?

COSMO. But we did it for fun.

ALICE. So did we.

COSMO (*his views on the universe crumbling*). You still like fun?

ALICE. Take care, Cosmo.

COSMO. But you're our mother.

ALICE. Mustn't mothers have fun?

COSMO (*heavily*). Must they? I see. You had played the dowager.

ALICE. No, I didn't. I played the girl in the Wellington boots.

COSMO (*blinking*). Mother, I played the girl in the Wellington boots.

ALICE (*happily*). My son—this ought to bring us closer together.

COSMO (*who has not yet learned to leave well alone.*) But the reason I did it was that we were all boys. Were there no young ladies where you did it, mother?

ALICE. Cosmo.

(*She is not a tamed mother yet, and in sudden wrath she flips his face with her hand. He accepts it as a smack. The* COLONEL *foolishly chooses this moment to make his return. He is in high good-humour, and does not observe that two of his nearest relatives are glaring at each other.*)

COLONEL (*purring offensively*). It's all right now, Alice; she took to me at once.

ALICE (*tartly*). Oh, did she!

COLONEL. Gurgled at me—pulled my moustache.

ALICE. I hope you got on with our dear son as well.

COLONEL. Isn't he a fine fellow?

ALICE. *I* have just been smacking his face.

(*She sits down and weeps, while her son stands haughtily at attention.*)

COLONEL (*with a groan*). Hst, I think you had better go and get that evening paper.

(COSMO *departs with his flag flying, and the bewildered husband seeks enlightenment.*)

Smacked his face. But why, Alice?

ALICE. He infuriated me.

COLONEL. He seems such a good boy.

ALICE (*the lowly*). No doubt he is. It must be very trying to have me for a mother.

COLONEL. Perhaps you were too demonstrative?

ALICE. I dare say. A woman he doesn't know! No wonder I disgusted him.

COLONEL. I can't make it out.

ALICE (*abjectly*). It's quite simple. He saw through me at once; so did baby.

(*The* COLONEL *flings up his hands. He hears whisperings outside the door. He peeps and returns excitedly.*)

COLONEL. Alice, there's a girl there with Cosmo.

ALICE (*on her feet, with a cry*). Amy!

COLONEL (*trembling*). I suppose so.

ALICE (*gripping him*). Robert, if *she* doesn't love me I shall die.

COLONEL. She will, she will. (*But he has grown nervous.*) Don't be too demonstrative, dearest.

ALICE. I shall try to be cold. Oh, Amy, love me!

(AMY *comes, her hair up, and is at once in her father's arms. Then she wants to leap into the arms of the mother who craves for her. But* ALICE *is afraid of being too demonstrative, and restrains herself. She presses* AMY'S *hands only.*)

ALICE. It is you, Amy. How are you, dear? (*She ventures at last to kiss her.*) It is a great pleasure to your father and me to see you again.

AMY (*damped*). Thank you, mother— Of course I have been looking forward to this meeting very much also.

ALICE (*shuddering*). It is very sweet of you to say so.

('Oh, how cold,' they are both thinking, while the COLONEL *regards them uncomfortably.* AMY *turns to him. She knows already that there is a safe harbourage there.)*

AMY. Would you have known me, father?

COLONEL. I wonder. She's not like you, Alice?

ALICE. No. *I* used to be demonstrative, Amy—

AMY (*eagerly*). Were you?

ALICE (*hurriedly*). Oh, I grew out of it long ago.

AMY (*disappointed but sympathetic*). The wear and tear of life.

ALICE (*wincing*). No doubt.

AMY (*making conversation*). You have seen Cosmo?

ALICE. Yes.

AMY (*with pardonable curiosity*). What did you think of him?

ALICE. He—seemed a nice boy—

AMY (*hurt*). And baby?

ALICE. Yes—oh yes.

AMY. Isn't she fat?

ALICE. Is she?

(*The* NURSE's *head intrudes.*)

NURSE. If you please, sir—I think baby wants *you* again.

(*The* COLONEL's *face exudes complacency, but he has the grace to falter.*)

COLONEL. What do you think, Alice?

ALICE (*broken under the blow*). By all means, go.

COLONEL. Won't you come also? Perhaps if I am with you—

ALICE (*after giving him an annihilating look*). No, I—I had quite a long time with her.

(*The* COLONEL *tiptoes off to his babe with a countenance of foolish rapture; and mother and daughter are alone.*)

AMY (*wishing her father would come back*). You can't have been very long with baby, mother.

ALICE. Quite long enough.

AMY. Oh. (*Some seconds elapse before she can speak again.*) You will have some tea, won't you?

ALICE. Thank you, dear. (*They sit down to a chilly meal.*)

AMY (*merely a hostess*). Both milk and sugar?

ALICE (*merely a guest*). No sugar.

AMY. I hope you will like the house, mother.

ALICE. I am sure you have chosen wisely. I see you are artistic.

AMY. The decoration isn't finished. I haven't quite decided what this room is to be like yet.

ALICE. One never can tell.

AMY (*making conversation*). Did you notice that there is a circular drive to the house?

ALICE. No, I didn't notice.

AMY. That would be because the cab filled it; but you can see it if you are walking.

ALICE. I shall look out for it. (*Grown desperate*) Amy, have you nothing more important to say to me?

AMY (*faltering*). You mean—the keys? Here they are; all with labels on them. And here are the tradesmen's books. They are all paid up to Wednesday. (*She sadly lets them go. They lie disregarded in her mother's lap.*)

ALICE. Is there nothing else?

AMY (*with a flash of pride*). Perhaps you have noticed that my hair is up?

ALICE. It so took me aback, Amy, when you came into the room. How long have you had it up?

AMY (*with large eyes*). Not very long. I—I began only to-day.

ALICE (*imploringly*). Dear, put it down again. You are not grown up.

AMY (*almost sternly*). I feel I am a woman now.

ALICE (*abject*). A woman—you? Am I never to know my daughter as a girl!

AMY. You were married before you were eighteen.

ALICE. Ah, but I had no mother. And even at that age I knew the world.

AMY (*smiling sadly*). Oh, mother, not so well as I know it.

ALICE (*sharply*). What can you know of the world?

AMY (*shuddering*). More, I hope, mother, than you will ever know.

ALICE (*alarmed*). My child! (*Seizing her*) Amy, tell me what you know.

AMY. Don't ask me, please. I have sworn not to talk of it.

ALICE. Sworn? To whom?

AMY. To another.

(ALICE, *with a sinking, pounces on her daughter's engagement finger; but it is unadorned.*)

ALICE. Tell me, Amy, who is that other?

AMY (*bravely*). It is our secret.

ALICE. Amy, I beg you—

AMY (*a heroic figure*). Dear mother, I am so sorry I must decline.

ALICE. You defy me! (*She takes hold of her daughter's shoulders.*) Amy, you drive me frantic. If you don't tell me at once I shall insist on your father— Oh, you—

(*It is not to be denied that she is shaking* AMY *when the* COLONEL *once more intrudes.*)

COLONEL (*aghast*). Good heavens, Alice, again! Amy, what does this mean?

AMY (*as she runs, insulted and in tears, from the room*). It means, father, that I love *you* very much.

COLONEL (*badgered*). Won't you explain, Alice?

ALICE. Robert, I am in terror about Amy.

COLONEL. Why?

ALICE. Don't ask me, dear—not now—not till I

have spoken to her again. (*She clings to her husband.*) Robert, there can't be anything in it?

COLONEL. If you mean anything wrong with our girl, there isn't, memsahib. What great innocent eyes she has!

ALICE (*eagerly*). Yes, yes, hasn't she, Robert?

COLONEL. All's well with Amy, dear.

ALICE. Of course it is. It was silly of me— My Amy.

COLONEL. And mine.

ALICE. But she seems to me hard to understand. (*With her head on his breast*) I begin to feel, Robert, that I should have come back to my children long ago—or I shouldn't have come back at all.

(*The* COLONEL *is endeavouring to soothe her when* STEPHEN ROLLO *is shown in. He is very young—too young to be a villain, too round-faced; but he is all the villain we can provide for* AMY. *His entrance is less ostentatious than it might be if he knew of the rôle that has been assigned to him. He thinks indeed* (*sometimes with a sigh*) *that he is a very good young man; and the* COLONEL *and* ALICE (*without the sigh*) *think so too. After warm greetings:*)

STEVE. Alice, I dare say you wish me at Jericho; but it's six months since I saw you, and I couldn't wait till to-morrow.

ALICE (*giving him her cheek*). I believe there's

some one in this house glad to see me at last; and you may kiss me for that, Steve.

STEVE (*who has found the cheek wet*). You are not telling me they don't adore her?

COLONEL. I can't understand it.

STEVE. But by all the little gods of India, you know, every one has always adored Alice.

ALICE (*plaintively*). That's why I take it so ill, Steve.

STEVE. Can I do anything? See here, if the house is upside down and you would like to get rid of the Colonel for an hour or two, suppose he dines with me to-night? I'm dying to hear all the news of the Punjaub since I left.

COLONEL (*with an eye on the nursery door*). No, Steve, I—the fact is—I have an engagement.

ALICE (*vindictively*). He means he can't leave the baby.

STEVE. It has taken to *him?*

COLONEL (*swaggering*). Enormously.

ALICE (*whimpering*). They all have. He has stolen them from me. He has taken up his permanent residence in the nursery.

COLONEL. Pooh, fiddle-de-dee. I shall probably come round to-night to see you after dinner, Steve, and bring memsahib with me. In the meantime—

ALICE (*whose mind is still misgiving her about*

AMY). In the meantime I want to have a word with Steve alone, Robert.

COLONEL. Very good. (*Stealing towards the nursery*) Then I shall pop in here again. How is the tea business prospering in London, Steve? Glad you left India?

STEVE. I don't have half the salary I had in India, but my health is better. How are rupees?

COLONEL. Stop it. (*He is making a doll of his handkerchief for the further subjugation of* MOLLY. *He sees his happy face in a looking-glass and is ashamed of it.*) Alice, I wish it was you they loved.

ALICE (*with withering scorn*). Oh, go back to your baby.

(*As soon as the* COLONEL *has gone she turns anxiously to* STEVE.)

Steve, tell me candidly what you think of my girl.

STEVE. But I have never set eyes on her.

ALICE. Oh, I was hoping you knew her well. She goes sometimes to the Deans and the Rawlings—all our old Indian friends—

STEVE. So do I, but we never happened to be there at the same time. They often speak of her, though.

ALICE. What do they say?

STEVE. They are enthusiastic—an ideal, sweet girl.

ALICE (*relieved*). I'm so glad. Now you can go, Steve.

STEVE. It's odd to think of the bells of the Punjaub as a mother of a big girl.

ALICE. Don't; or I shall begin to thing it's absurd myself.

STEVE. Surely the boy felt the spell. (*She shakes her head.*) But the boys always did.

ALICE (*wryly*). They were older boys.

STEVE. I believe I was the only one you never flirted with.

ALICE (*smiling*). No one could flirt with you, Steve.

STEVE (*pondering*). I wonder why. (*The problem has troubled him occasionally for years.*)

ALICE. I wonder.

STEVE. I suppose there's some sort of want in me.

ALICE. Perhaps that's it. No, it's because you were always such a good boy.

STEVE (*wincing*). I don't know. Sometimes when I saw you all flirting I wanted to do it too, but I could never think of how to begin. (*With a sigh*) I feel sure there's something pleasant about it.

ALICE. You're a dear old donkey, Steve, but I'm glad you came, it has made the place seem more like home. All these years I was looking forward to home; and now I feel that perhaps it is the place I have left behind me.

(*The joyous gurgling of* MOLLY *draws them to the nursery door; and there they are observed*

by AMY *and* GINEVRA *who enter from the hall. The screen is close to the two girls, and they have so often in the last week seen stage figures pop behind screens that, mechanically as it were, they pop behind this one.*)

STEVE (*who little knows that he is now entering on the gay career*). Listen to the infant.

ALICE. Isn't it horrid of Robert to get on with her so well. Steve, say Robert's a brute.

STEVE (*as he bids her good-afternoon*). Of course he is; a selfish beast.

ALICE. There's another kiss to you for saying so. (*The doomed woman presents her cheek again.*)

STEVE. And you'll come to me after dinner to-night, Alice? Here, I'll leave my card, I'm not half a mile from this street.

ALICE. I mayn't be able to get away. It will depend on whether my silly husband wants to stay with his wretch of a baby. I'll see you to the door. Steve, you're *much* nicer than Robert.

(*With these dreadful words she and the libertine go.* AMY *and* GINEVRA *emerge white to the lips; or, at least, they feel as white as that.*)

AMY (*clinging to the screen for support*). He kissed her.

GINEVRA (*sternly*). He called her Alice.

AMY. She is going to his house to-night. An assignation.

GINEVRA. They will be chambers, Amy—they are always chambers. And *after* dinner, he said—so he's stingy, too. Here is his card: 'Mr. Stephen Rollo.'

AMY. I have heard of him. They said he was a nice man.

GINEVRA. The address is Kensington West. That's the new name for West Kensington.

AMY. My poor father. It would kill him.

GINEVRA (*the master mind*). He must never know.

AMY. Ginevra, what's to be done?

GINEVRA. Thank heaven, we know exactly what to do. It rests with you to save her.

AMY (*trembling*). You mean I must go—to his chambers?

GINEVRA (*firmly*). At any cost.

AMY. Evening dress?

GINEVRA. It is always evening dress. And don't be afraid of his Man, dear; they always have a Man.

AMY. Oh, Ginevra.

GINEVRA. First try fascination. You remember how they fling back their cloak—like this, dear. If that fails, threaten him. You *must* get back the letters. There are always letters.

AMY. If father should suspect and follow? They usually do.

GINEVRA. Then you must sacrifice yourself for her. Does my dearest falter?

AMY (*pressing* GINEVRA'S *hand*). I will do my duty. Oh, Ginevra, what things there will be to put in my diary to-night.

ACT II

NIGHT has fallen, and Amy is probably now in her bedroom, fully arrayed for her dreadful mission. She says good-bye to her diary—perhaps for aye. She steals from the house— But we see none of this. We are transported to a very different scene, which (if one were sufficiently daring) would represent a Man's Chambers at Midnight. There is no really valid excuse for shirking this scene, which is so popular that every theatre has it stowed away in readiness; it is capable of 'setting' itself should the stagehands forget to do so.

It should be a handsome, sombre room in oak and dark red, with sinister easy-chairs and couches, great curtains discreetly drawn, a door to enter by, a door to hide by, a carelessly strewn table on which to write a letter reluctantly to dictation, another table exquisitely decorated for supper for two, champagne in an ice-bucket, many rows of books which on close examination will prove to be painted wood (the stage Lotharios not being really reading men). The lamps shed a diffused light, and one of them is slightly odd in construction, because it is for knocking over presently in order to let the lady escape unobserved.

Through this room moves occasionally the man's man, sleek, imperturbable, announcing the lady, the lady's husband, the woman friend who is to save them; he says little, but is responsible for all the arrangements going right; before the curtain rises he may be conceived trying the lamp and making sure that the lady will not stick in the door.

That is how it ought to be, that is how Amy has seen it several times in the past week; and now that we come to the grapple we wish we could give you what you want, for you do want it, you have been used to it, and you will feel that you are looking at a strange middle act without it. But Steve cannot have such a room as this, he has only two hundred and fifty pounds a year, including the legacy from his aunt. Besides, though he is to be a Lothario (in so far as we can manage it) he is not at present aware of this, and has made none of the necessary arrangements: if one of his lamps is knocked over it will certainly explode; and there cannot be a secret door without its leading into the adjoining house. (Theatres keep special kinds of architects to design their rooms.) There is indeed a little cupboard where his crockery is kept, and if Amy is careful she might be able to squeeze in there. We cannot even make the hour midnight; it is eight-thirty, quite late enough for her to be out alone.

Steve has just finished dinner, in his comfortable

lodgings. He is not even in evening dress, but he does wear a lounge jacket, which we devoutly hope will give him a rakish air to Amy's eyes. He would undoubtedly have put on evening dress if he had known she was coming. His man, Richardson, is waiting on him. When we wrote that we deliberated a long time. It has an air, and with a little low cunning we could make you think to the very end that Richardson was a male. But if the play is acted and you go to see it, you would be disappointed. Steve, the wretched fellow, never had a Man, and Richardson is only his landlady's slavey, aged about fifteen, and wistful at sight of food. We introduce her gazing at Steve's platter as if it were a fairy tale. Steve has often caught her with this rapt expression on her face, and sometimes, as now, an engaging game ensues.

RICHARDSON (*blinking*). Are you finished, sir?

(*To those who know the game this means, 'Are you to leave the other chop—the one sitting lonely and lovely beneath the dish-cover?'*)

STEVE. Yes. (*In the game this is merely a tantaliser.*)

RICHARDSON (*almost sure that he is in the right mood and sending out a feeler*). Then am I to clear?

STEVE. No.

(*This is intended to puzzle her, but it is a move*

he has made so often that she understands its meaning at once.)

RICHARDSON (*in entranced giggles*). He, he, he!

STEVE (*vacating his seat*). Sit down.

RICHARDSON. Again?

STEVE. Sit down, and clear the enemy out of that dish.

(*By the enemy he means the other chop: what a name for a chop.* STEVE *plays the part of butler. He brings her a plate from the little cupboard.*) Dinner is served, madam.

RICHARDSON (*who will probably be a great duchess some day*). I don't mind if I does have a snack. (*She places herself at the table after what she conceives to be the manner of the genteelly gluttonous; then she quakes a little.*) If Missis was to catch me. (*She knows that* MISSIS *is probably sitting downstairs with her arms folded, hopeful of the chop for herself.*)

STEVE. You tuck in and I'll keep watch.

(*He goes to the door to peer over the banisters; it is all part of the game.* RICHARDSON *promptly tucks in with horrid relish.*)

RICHARDSON. What makes you so good to me, sir?

STEVE. A gentleman is always good to a lady.

RICHARDSON (*preening*). A lady? Go on.

STEVE. And when I found that at my dinner hour you were subject to growing pains I remembered my own youth. Potatoes, madam?

RICHARDSON (*neatly*). If quite convenient.

(*The kindly young man surveys her for some time in silence while she has various happy adventures.*)

STEVE. Can I smoke, Richardson?

RICHARDSON. Of course you can smoke. I have often seen you smoking.

STEVE (*little aware of what an evening the sex is to give him*). But have I your permission?

RICHARDSON. You're at your tricks again.

STEVE (*severely*). Have you forgotten already how I told you a true lady would answer?

RICHARDSON. I minds, but it makes me that shy. (*She has, however, a try at it.*) Do smoke, Mr. Rollo, I loves the smell of it.

(STEVE *lights his pipe; no real villain smokes a pipe.*)

STEVE. Smoking is a blessed companion to a lonely devil like myself.

RICHARDSON. Yes, sir. (*Sharply*) Would you say devil to a real lady, sir?

(STEVE, *it may be hoped, is properly confused, but here the little idyll of the chop is brought to a close by the tinkle of a bell.* RICHARDSON *springs to attention.*)

That will be the friends you are expecting?

STEVE. I was only half expecting them, but I dare say you are right. Have you finished, Richardson?

RICHARDSON. Thereabouts. Would a real lady lick the bone—in company, I mean?

STEVE. You know, I hardly think so.

RICHARDSON. Then I'm finished.

STEVE (*disappearing*). Say I'll be back in a jiffy. I need brushing, Richardson.

(RICHARDSON, *no longer in company, is about to hold a last friendly communion with the bone when there is a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of a mysterious lady. You could never guess who the lady is, so we may admit at once that it is* MISS AMY GREY. AMY *is in evening dress—her only evening dress—and over it is the cloak, which she is presently to fling back with staggering effect. Just now her pale face is hiding behind the collar of it, for she is quaking inwardly though strung up to a terrible ordeal. The room is not as she expected, but she knows that men are cunning.*)

AMY (*frowning*). Are these Mr. Rollo's chambers? The woman told me to knock at this door.

(*She remembers with a certain satisfaction that the woman had looked at her suspiciously.*)

RICHARDSON (*the tray in her hand to give her confidence*). Yes, ma'am. He will be down in a minute, ma'am. He is expecting you, ma'am.

(*Expecting her, is he!* AMY *smiles the bitter smile of knowledge.*)

AMY. We shall see. (*She looks about her.*) (*Sharply*) Where is his man?

RICHARDSON (*with the guilt of the chop on her conscience*). What man?

AMY (*brushing this subterfuge aside*). His man. They always have a man.

RICHARDSON (*with spirit*). He is a man himself.

AMY. Come, girl; who waits on him?

RICHARDSON. Me.

AMY (*rather daunted*). No man? Very strange. (*Fortunately she sees the two plates.*) Stop. (*Her eyes glisten.*) Two persons have been dining here! (RICHARDSON *begins to tremble.*) Why do you look so scared? Was the other a gentleman?

RICHARDSON. Oh, ma'am.

AMY (*triumphantly*). It was not! (*But her triumph gives way to bewilderment, for she knows that when she left the house her mother was still in it. Then who can the visitor have been?*) Why are you trying to hide that plate? Was it a lady? Girl, tell me was it a lady?

RICHARDSON (*at bay*). He—he calls her a lady.

AMY (*the omniscient*). But you know better!

RICHARDSON. Of course I know she ain't a real lady.

AMY. Another woman. And not even a lady. (*She has no mercy on the witness.*) Tell me, is this the first time she has dined here?

RICHARDSON (*fixed by* AMY'S *eye*). No, ma'am—I meant no harm, ma'am.

AMY. I am not blaming *you*. Can you remember how often she has dined here?

RICHARDSON. Well can I remember. Three times last week.

AMY. Three times in one week! Monstrous.

RICHARDSON (*with her gown to her eyes*). Yes, ma'am; I see it now.

AMY (*considering and pouncing*). Do you think she is an adventuress?

RICHARDSON. What's that?

AMY. Does she smoke cigarettes?

RICHARDSON (*rather spiritedly*). No, she don't.

AMY (*taken aback*). Not an adventuress.

(*She wishes* GINEVRA *were here to help her. She draws upon her stock of knowledge.*)

Can she be secretly married to him? A wife of the past turned up to blackmail him? That's very common.

RICHARDSON. Oh, ma'am, you are terrifying me.

AMY. I wasn't talking to you. You may go. Stop. How long had she been here before I came?

RICHARDSON. She—Her what you are speaking about—

AMY. Come, I must know. (*The terrible admission refuses to pass* RICHARDSON'S *lips, and of a sud-*

den AMY *has a dark suspicion.*) Has she gone? Is she here now?

RICHARDSON. It was just a chop. What makes you so grudging of a chop?

AMY. I don't care what they ate. Has she gone?

RICHARDSON. Oh, ma'am.

(*The little maid, bearing the dishes, backs to the door, opens it with her foot, and escapes from this terrible visitor. The drawn curtains attracts* AMY'S *eagle eye, and she looks behind them. There is no one there. She pulls open the door of the cupboard and says firmly, 'Come out.' No one comes. She peeps into the cupboard and finds it empty. A cupboard and no one in it. How strange. She sits down almost in tears, wishing very much for the counsel of* GINEVRA. *Thus* STEVE *finds her when he returns.*)

STEVE. I'm awfully glad, Alice, that you—

(*He stops abruptly at sight of a strange lady. As for* AMY, *the word 'Alice' brings her to her feet.*)

AMY. Sir. (*A short remark but withering.*)

STEVE. I beg your pardon. I thought—the fact is that I expected— You see you are a stranger to me—my name is Rollo—you are not calling on me, are you? (AMY *inclines her head in a way that* GINEVRA *and she have practised. Then she flings back her cloak as suddenly as an expert may open an um-*

brella. Having done this she awaits results. STEVE, *however, has no knowledge of how to play his part; he probably favours musical comedy. He says lamely:*) I still think there must be some mistake.

AMY (*in italics*). There is no mistake.

STEVE. Then is there anything I can do for you?

AMY (*ardently*). You can do so much.

STEVE. Perhaps if you will sit down—

(AMY *decides to humour him so far. She would like to sit in the lovely stage way, when they know so precisely where the chair is that they can sit without a glance at it. But she dare not, though* GINEVRA *would have risked it.* STEVE *is emboldened to say:*)

By the way, you have not told me *your* name.

AMY (*nervously*). If you please, do you mind my not telling it?

STEVE. Oh, very well. (*First he thinks there is something innocent about her request, and then he wonders if 'innocent' is the right word.*) Well, your business, please? (*he demands, like the man of the world he hopes some day to be*).

AMY. Why are you not in evening dress?

STEVE (*taken aback*). Does that matter?

AMY (*though it still worries her*). I suppose not.

STEVE (*with growing stiffness*). Your business, if you will be so good?

(AMY *advances upon him. She has been seated*

in any case as long as they ever do sit on the stage on the same chair.)

AMY. Stephen Rollo, the game is up.

(*She likes this; she will be able to go on now.*)

STEVE (*recoiling guiltily, or so she will describe it to* GINEVRA). What on earth—

AMY (*suffering from a determination from the mouth of phrases she has collected in five theatres*). A chance discovery, Mr. Stephen Rollo, has betrayed your secret to me.

STEVE (*awed*). My secret? What is it? (*He rushes rapidly through a well-spent youth.*)

AMY (*risking a good deal*). It is this: that woman is your wife.

STEVE. What woman?

AMY. The woman who dined with you here this evening.

STEVE. With me?

AMY (*icily*). This is useless; as I have already said, the game is up.

STEVE (*glancing in a mirror to make sure he is still the same person*). You *look* a nice girl, but dash it all! Whom can you be taking me for? Tell me some more about myself.

AMY. Please desist. I know everything, and in a way I am sorry for you. All these years you have kept the marriage a secret, for she is a horrid sort of

woman, and now she has come back to blackmail you. That, however, is not my affair.

STEVE (*with unexpected power of irony*). Oh, I wouldn't say that.

AMY. I do say it, Mr. Stephen Rollo. I shall keep your secret—

STEVE. Ought you?

AMY. —on one condition, and on one condition only, that you return me the letters.

STEVE. The letters?

AMY. The letters.

(STEVE *walks the length of his room, regarding her sideways.*)

STEVE. Look here, honestly I don't know what you are talking about. You know, I could be angry with you, but I feel sure you are sincere.

AMY. Indeed I am.

STEVE. Well, then, I assure you on my word of honour that no lady was dining with me this evening, and that I have no wife.

AMY (*blankly*). No wife! You are sure? Oh, think!

STEVE. I swear it.

AMY. I am very sorry. (*She sinks dispiritedly into a chair.*)

STEVE. Sorry I have no wife? (*She nods through her tears.*) Don't cry. How could my having a wife be a boon to you?

AMY (*plaintively*). It would have put you in the hollow of my hands.

STEVE (*idiotically*). And they are nice hands, too.

AMY (*with a consciousness that he might once upon a time have been saved by a good woman*). I suppose that is how you got round her.

STEVE (*stamping his foot*). Haven't I told you that she doesn't exist?

AMY. I don't mean her—I mean her—

(*He decides that she is a little crazy.*)

STEVE (*soothingly*). Come now, we won't go into that again. It was just a mistake; and now that it is all settled and done with, I'll tell you what we shall do. You will let me get you a cab— (*She shakes her head.*) I promise not to listen to the address; and after you have had a good night you—you will see things differently.

AMY (*ashamed of her momentary weakness, and deciding not to enter it in the diary*). You are very clever, Mr. Stephon Rollo, but I don't leave this house without the letters.

STEVE (*groaning*). Are they your letters?

AMY. How dare you! They are the letters written to you, as you well know, by—

STEVE (*eagerly*). Yes?

AMY. —by a certain lady. Spare me the pain, if you are a gentleman, of having to mention her name.

STEVE (*sulkily*). Oh, all right.

AMY. She is to pass out of your life to-night. To-morrow you go abroad for a long time.

STEVE (*with excusable warmth*). Oh, do I! Where am I going?

AMY. We thought—

STEVE. We?

AMY. A friend and I who have been talking it over. We thought of Africa—to shoot big game.

STEVE (*humouring her*). You must be very fond of this lady.

AMY. I would die for her.

STEVE (*feeling that he ought really to stick up a little for himself*). After all, am I so dreadful? Why shouldn't she love me?

AMY. A married woman!

STEVE (*gratified*). Married?

AMY. How can you play with me so, sir? She is my mother.

STEVE. Your mother? Fond of me!

AMY. How dare you look pleased!

STEVE. I'm not—I didn't mean to. I say, I wish you would tell me who you are.

AMY. As if you didn't know.

STEVE (*in a dream*). Fond of me! I can't believe it. (*Rather wistfully*) How could she be?

AMY. It was all your fault. Such men as you—pitiless men—you made her love you.

STEVE (*still elated*). Do you think I am that kind of man?

AMY. Oh, sir, let her go. You are strong and she is weak. Think of her poor husband, and give me back the letters.

STEVE. On my word of honour— (*Here arrives* RICHARDSON, *so anxious to come that she is propelled into the room like a ball*). What is it?

RICHARDSON. A gentleman downstairs, sir, wanting to see you.

AMY (*saying the right thing at once*). He must not find me here. My reputation—

STEVE. I can guess who it is. Let me think. (*He is really glad of the interruption.*) See here, I'll keep him downstairs for a moment. Richardson, take this lady to the upper landing until I have brought him in. Then show her out.

RICHARDSON. Oh, lor'!

AMY (*rooting herself to the floor*). The letters!

STEVE (*as he goes*). Write to me, write to me. I must know more of this.

RICHARDSON. Come quick, miss.

AMY (*fixing her*). You are not deceiving me? You are sure it isn't a lady?

RICHARDSON. Yes, miss—he said his name was Colonel Grey.

(GINEVRA *would have known that it must be the husband, but for the moment* AMY *is appalled.*)

AMY (*quivering*). Can he suspect!

RICHARDSON (*who has her own troubles*). About the chop?

AMY. If she should come while he is here!

RICHARDSON. Come along, miss. What's the matter?

AMY. I can't go away. I am not going.

(*She darts into the cupboard. It is as if she had heard* GINEVRA *cry, 'Amy, the cupboard.'*)

RICHARDSON (*tugging at the closed door*). Come out of that. I promised to put you on the upper landing. You can't go hiding in there, lady.

AMY (*peeping out*). I can and I will. Let go the door. I came here expecting to have to hide.

(*She closes the door as her father enters with* STEVE. *The* COLONEL *is chatting, but his host sees that* RICHARDSON *is in distress.*)

STEVE (*who thinks that the lady has been got rid of*). What is it?

RICHARDSON. Would you speak with me a minute, sir?

STEVE (*pointedly*). Go away. You have some work to do on the stair. Go and do it. I'm sorry, Colonel, that you didn't bring Alice with you.

COLONEL. She is coming on later.

STEVE. Good.

COLONEL. I have come from Pall Mall. Wanted

to look in at the club once more, so I had a chop there.

RICHARDSON (*with the old sinking*). A chop!

(*She departs with her worst suspicions confirmed.*)

STEVE (*as they pull their chairs nearer to the fire*). Is Alice coming on from home?

COLONEL. Yes, that's it. (*He stretches out his legs.*) Steve, home is the best club in the world. Such jolly fellows all the members!

STEVE. You haven't come here to talk about your confounded baby again, have you?

COLONEL (*apologetically*). If you don't mind.

STEVE. I do mind.

COLONEL. But if you feel you can stand it.

STEVE. You are my guest, so go ahead.

COLONEL. She fell asleep, Steve, holding my finger.

STEVE. Which finger?

COLONEL. This one. As Alice would say, 'Soldiering done, baby begun.'

STEVE. Poor old chap.

COLONEL. I have been through a good deal in my time, Steve, but that is the biggest thing I have ever done.

STEVE. Have a cigar?

COLONEL. Brute! Thanks.

(*Here* AMY, *who cannot hear when the door is*

closed, opens it slightly. The COLONEL *is presently aware that* STEVE *is silently smiling to himself. The* COLONEL *makes a happy guess.*)

Thinking of the ladies, Steve?

STEVE (*blandly*). To tell the truth, I *was* thinking of one.

COLONEL. She seems to be a nice girl.

STEVE. She is not exactly a girl.

COLONEL (*twinkling*). Very fond of you, Steve?

STEVE. I have the best of reasons for knowing that she is. (*We may conceive* AMY'S *feelings though we cannot see her.*) On my soul, Colonel, I think it is the most romantic affair I ever heard of. I have waited long for a romance to come into my life, but by Javers, it has come at last.

COLONEL. Graters, Steve. Does her family like it?

STEVE (*cheerily*). No, they are furious.

COLONEL. But why?

STEVE (*judiciously*). A woman's secret, Colonel.

COLONEL. Ah, the plot thickens. Do I know her?

STEVE. Not you.

COLONEL. I mustn't ask her name?

STEVE (*with presence of mind*). I have a very good reason for not telling you her name.

COLONEL. So? And she is not exactly young? Twice your age, Steve?

STEVE (*with excusable heat*). Not at all. But she is of the age when a woman knows her own mind—

which makes the whole affair extraordinarily flattering. (*With undoubtedly a shudder of disgust* AMY *closes the cupboard door.* STEVE *continues to behave in the most gallant manner.*) You must not quiz me, Colonel, for her circumstances are such that her partiality for me puts her in a dangerous position, and I would go to the stake rather than give her away.

COLONEL. Quite so.

(*He makes obeisance to the beauty of the sentiment, and then proceeds to an examination of the hearthrug.*)

STEVE. What are you doing?

COLONEL. Trying to find out for myself whether she comes here.

STEVE. How can you find that out by crawling about my carpet?

COLONEL. I am looking for hairpins—(*triumphantly holding up a lady's glove*)—and I have found one!

(*They have been too engrossed to hear the bell ring, but now voices are audible.*)

STEVE. There is some one coming up.

COLONEL. Perhaps it is *she,* Steve! No, that is Alice's voice. Catch, you scoundrel (*and he tosses him the glove.* ALICE *is shown in, and is warmly acclaimed. She would not feel so much at ease if she knew who, hand on heart, has recognised her through the pantry keyhole*).

STEVE (*as he makes* ALICE *comfortable by the fire*). How did you leave them at home?

ALICE (*relapsing into gloom*). All hating me.

STEVE. This man says that home is the most delightful club in the world.

ALICE. I am not a member; I have been blackballed by my own baby. Robert, I dined in state with Cosmo, and he was so sulky that he ate his fish without salt rather than ask me to pass it.

COLONEL. Where was Amy?

ALICE. Amy said she had a headache and went to bed. I spoke to her through the door before I came out, but she wouldn't answer.

COLONEL. Why didn't you go in, memsahib?

ALICE. I did venture to think of it, but she had locked the door. Robert, I really am worried about Amy. She seems to me to behave oddly. There can't be anything wrong?

COLONEL. Of course not, Alice—eh, Steve?

STEVE. Bless you, no.

ALICE (*smiling*). It's much Steve knows about women.

STEVE. I'm not so unattractive to women, Alice, as you think.

ALICE. Listen to him, Robert!

COLONEL. What he means, my dear, is that you should see him with elderly ladies.

ALICE. Steve, this to people who know you.

(*Here something happens to* AMY'S *skirt. She has opened the door to hear, then in alarm shut it, leaving a fragment of skirt caught in the door. There, unseen, it bides its time.*)

STEVE (*darkly*). Don't be so sure you know me, Alice.

COLONEL (*enjoying himself*). Let us tell her, Steve! I am dying to tell her.

STEVE (*grandly*). No, no.

COLONEL. We mustn't tell you, Alice, because it is a woman's secret—a poor little fond elderly woman. Our friend is very proud of his conquest. See how he is ruffling his feathers. I shouldn't wonder, you know, though you and I are in the way tonight.

(*But* ALICE'S *attention is directed in another direction: to a little white object struggling in the clutches of a closed door at the back of the room.* STEVE *turns to see what she is looking at, and at the same moment the door opens sufficiently to allow a pretty hand to obtrude, seize the kitten, or whatever it was, and softly reclose the door. For one second* ALICE *did think it might be a kitten, but she knows now that it is part of a woman's dress. As for* STEVE *thus suddenly acquainted with his recent visitor's whereabouts, his mouth opens wider than the door. He ap-*

peals mutely to ALICE *not to betray his strange secret to the* COLONEL.)

ALICE (*with dancing eyes*). May I look about me, Steve? I have been neglecting your room shamefully.

STEVE (*alarmed, for he knows the woman*). Don't get up, Alice; there is really nothing to see.

(*But she is already making the journey of the room, and drawing nearer to the door.*)

ALICE (*playing with him*). I like your clock.

STEVE. It is my landlady's. Nearly all the things are hers. Do come back to the fire.

ALICE. Don't mind me. What does this door lead into?

STEVE. Only a cupboard.

ALICE. What do you keep in it?

STEVE. Merely crockery—that sort of thing.

ALICE. I should like to see your crockery, Steve. Not one little bit of china? May I peep in?

COLONEL (*who is placidly smoking, with his back to the scene of the drama*). Don't mind her, Steve; she never could see a door without itching to open it.

(ALICE *opens the door, and sees* AMY *standing there with her finger to her lips, just as they stood in all the five plays.* GINEVRA *could not have posed her better.*)

Well, have you found anything, memsahib?

(*It has been the great shock of* ALICE'S *life, and*

she sways. But she shuts the door before answering him.)

ALICE (*with a terrible look at* STEVE). Just a dark little cupboard.

(STEVE, *not aware that it is her daughter who is in there, wonders why the lighter aspect of the incident has ceased so suddenly to strike her. She returns to the fire, but not to her chair. She puts her arms round the neck of her husband; a great grief for him is welling up in her breast.*)

COLONEL (*so long used to her dear impulsive ways*). Hullo! We mustn't let on that we are fond of each other before company.

STEVE (*meaning well, though he had better have held his tongue*). I don't count; I am such an old friend.

ALICE (*slowly*). Such an old friend!

(*Her husband sees that she is struggling with some emotion.*)

COLONEL. Worrying about the children still, Alice?

ALICE (*glad to break down openly*). Yes, yes, I can't help it, Robert.

COLONEL (*petting her*). There, there, you foolish woman. Joy will come in the morning; I never was surer of anything. Would you like me to take you home now?

ALICE. Home. But, yes, I—let us go home.

COLONEL. Can we have a cab, Steve?

STEVE. I'll go down and whistle one. Alice, I'm awfully sorry that you—that I—

ALICE. Please, a cab.

(But though she is alone with her husband now she does not know what she wants to say to him. She has a passionate desire that he should not learn who is behind that door.)

COLONEL (*pulling her toward him*). I think it is about Amy that you worry most.

ALICE. Why should I, Robert?

COLONEL. Not a jot of reason.

ALICE. Say again, Robert, that everything is sure to come right just as we planned it would.

COLONEL. Of course it will.

ALICE. Robert, there is something I want to tell you. You know how dear my children are to me, but Amy is the dearest of all. She is dearer to me, Robert, than you yourself.

COLONEL. Very well, memsahib.

ALICE. Robert dear, Amy has come to a time in her life when she is neither quite a girl nor quite a woman. There are dark places before us at that age through which we have to pick our way without much help. I can conceive dead mothers haunting those places to watch how their child is to fare in them. Very frightened ghosts, Robert. I have thought so long of how I was to be within hail of my girl at this time, holding her hand—my Amy, my child.

COLONEL. That is just how it is all to turn out, my Alice.

ALICE (*shivering*). Yes, isn't it, isn't it?

COLONEL. You dear excitable, of course it is.

ALICE (*like one defying him*). But even though it were not, though I had come back too late, though my daughter had become a woman without a mother's guidance, though she were a bad woman—

COLONEL. Alice.

ALICE. Though some cur of a man—Robert, it wouldn't affect my love for her, I should love her more than ever. If all others turned from her, if you turned from her, Robert—how I should love her then.

COLONEL. Alice, don't talk of such things.

(*But she continues to talk of them, for she sees that the door is ajar, and what she says now is really to comfort* AMY. *Every word of it is a kiss for* AMY.)

ALICE (*smiling through her fears*). I was only telling you that nothing could make any difference in my love for Amy. That was all; and, of course, if she has ever been a little foolish, light-headed—at that age one often is—why, a mother would soon put all that right; she would just take her girl in her arms and they would talk it over, and the poor child's troubles would vanish. (*Still for* AMY'S *comfort*) And do you think I should repeat any of Amy's con-

fidences to you, Robert? (*Gaily*) Not a word, sir! She might be sure of that.

COLONEL. A pretty way to treat a father. But you will never persuade me that there is any serious flaw in Amy.

ALICE. I'll never try, dear.

COLONEL. As for this little tantrum of locking herself into her room, however, we must have it out with her.

ALICE. The first thing to-morrow.

COLONEL. Not a bit of it. The first thing the moment we get home.

ALICE (*now up against a new danger*). You forget, dear, that she has gone to bed.

COLONEL. We'll soon rout her out of bed.

ALICE. Robert! You forget that she has locked the door.

COLONEL. Sulky little darling. I dare say she is crying her eyes out for you already. But if she doesn't open that door pretty smartly I'll force it.

ALICE. You wouldn't do that?

COLONEL. Wouldn't I? Oh yes, I would.

(*Thus* ALICE *has another problem to meet when* STEVE *returns from his successful quest for a cab.*)

Thank you, Steve, you will excuse us running off, I know. Alice is all nerves to-night. Come along, dear.

ALICE (*signing to the puzzled* STEVE *that he must somehow get the lady out of the house at once*). There is no such dreadful hurry, is there? (*She is suddenly interested in some photographs on the wall.*) Are you in this group, Steve?

STEVE. Yes, it is an old school eleven.

ALICE. Let us see if we can pick Steve out, Robert.

COLONEL. Here he is, the one with the ball.

ALICE. Oh no, that can't be Steve, surely. Isn't this one more like him? Come over here under the light.

(STEVE *has his moment at the door, but it is evident from his face that the hidden one scorns his blandishments. So he signs to* ALICE.)

COLONEL. This is you, isn't it, Steve?

STEVE. Yes, the one with the ball.

COLONEL. I found you at once. Now, Alice, your cloak.

ALICE. I feel so comfy where I am. One does hate to leave a fire, doesn't one. (*She hums gaily a snatch of a song.*)

COLONEL. The woman doesn't know her own mind.

ALICE. You remember we danced to that once on my birthday at Simla.

(*She shows him how they danced at Simla.*)

COLONEL (*to* STEVE, *who is indeed the more be-*

wildered of the two). And a few minutes ago I assure you she was weeping on my shoulder!

ALICE. You were so nice to me that evening, Robert—I gave you a dance. (*She whirls him gaily round.*)

COLONEL. You flibberty-gibbet, you make me dizzy.

ALICE. Shall we sit out the rest of the dance?

COLONEL. Not I. Come along, you unreasonable thing.

ALICE. Unreasonable. Robert, I have a reason. I want to see whether Amy will come.

COLONEL. Come?

STEVE. Come here?

ALICE. I didn't tell you before, Robert, because I had so little hope; but I called to her through the door that I was coming here to meet you, and I said, 'I don't believe you have a headache, Amy; I believe you have locked yourself in there because you hate the poor mother who loves you,' and I begged her to come with me. I said, 'If you won't come now, come after me and make me happy.'

COLONEL. But what an odd message, Alice; so unlike you.

ALICE. Was it? I don't know. I always find it so hard, Robert, to be like myself.

COLONEL. But, my dear, a young girl.

ALICE. She could have taken a cab; I gave her the

address. Don't be so hard, Robert, I am teaching you to dance. (*She is off with him again.*)

COLONEL. Steve, the madcap.

(*He falls into a chair, but sees the room still going round. It is* ALICE'S *chance; she pounces upon* AMY'S *hand, whirls her out of the hiding-place, and seems to greet her at the other door.*)

ALICE. Amy!

COLONEL (*jumping up*). Not really? Hullo! I never for a moment— It was true, then. Amy, you are a good little girl to come.

AMY (*to whom this is a not unexpected step in the game*). Dear father.

STEVE (*to whom it is a very unexpected step indeed*). Amy! Is this—your daughter, Alice?

ALICE (*wondering at the perfidy of the creature*). I forgot that you don't know her, Steve.

STEVE. But if—if this is your daughter—you are the mother.

ALICE. The mother?

COLONEL (*jovially*). Well thought out, Steve. He is a master mind, Alice.

STEVE. But—but—

(*Mercifully* AMY *has not lost her head. She is here to save them all.*)

AMY. Introduce me, father.

COLONEL. He is astounded at our having such a big girl.

STEVE (*thankfully*). Yes, that's it.

COLONEL. Amy, my old friend, Steve Rollo—Steve, this is our rosebud.

STEVE (*blinking*). How do you do?

AMY (*sternly*). How do you do?

COLONEL. But, bless me, Amy, you are a swell.

AMY (*flushing*). It is only evening dress.

COLONEL. I bet she didn't dress for us, Alice; it was all done for Steve.

ALICE. Yes, for Steve.

COLONEL. But don't clutch me, chicken, clutch your mother. Steve, why are you staring at Alice?

(*We know why he is staring at* ALICE, *but of course he is too gallant a gentleman to tell. Besides, his astonishment has dazed him.*)

STEVE. Was I?

ALICE (*with her arms extended*). Amy, don't be afraid of me.

AMY (*going into them contemptuously*). I'm not.

COLONEL (*badgered*). Then kiss and make it up.

(AMY *bestows a cold kiss upon her mother.* ALICE *weeps.*)

This is too much. Just wait till I get you home. Are you both ready?

(*It is then that* AMY *makes her first mistake. The glove that the* COLONEL *has tossed to* STEVE *is lying on a chair, and she innocently begins to*

put it on. Her father stares at her; his wife does not know why.)

ALICE. We are ready, Robert. Why don't you come? Robert, what is it?

COLONEL (*darkening*). Steve knows what it is; Amy doesn't as yet. The simple soul has given herself away so innocently that it is almost a shame to take notice of it. But I must, Steve. Come, man, it can't be difficult to explain.

(*In this* STEVE *evidently differs from him.*)

ALICE. Robert, you frighten me.

COLONEL. Still tongue-tied, Steve. Before you came here, Alice, I found a lady's glove on the floor.

ALICE (*quickly*). That isn't our affair, Robert.

COLONEL. Yes; I'll tell you why. Amy has just put on that glove.

ALICE. It isn't hers, dear.

COLONEL. Do you deny that it is yours, Amy? (AMY *has no answer to this*). Is it unreasonable, Steve, to ask you when my daughter, with whom you profess to be unacquainted, gave you that token of her esteem?

STEVE (*helpless*). Alice.

COLONEL. What has Alice to do with it?

AMY (*to the rescue*). Nothing, nothing, I swear.

COLONEL. Has there been something going on that I don't understand? Are you in it, Alice, as well as they? Why has Steve been staring at you so?

AMY (*knowing so well that she alone can put this matter right*). Mother, don't answer.

STEVE. If I could see Alice alone for a moment, Colonel—

ALICE. Yes.

COLONEL. No. Good heavens, what are you all concealing? Is Amy—my Amy—your elderly lady, Steve? Was that some tasteful little joke you were playing on your old friend, her father?

STEVE. Colonel, I—

AMY (*preparing for the great sacrifice*). I forbid him to speak.

COLONEL. *You* forbid him.

ALICE. Robert, Robert, let me explain. Steve—

AMY. Mother, you must not, you dare not. (*Grandly*) Let all fall on me. It is not true, father, that Mr. Rollo and I were strangers when you introduced us.

ALICE (*wailing*). Amy, Amy!

AMY (*with a touch of the sublime*). It *is* my glove, but it had a right to be here. He is my affianced husband.

(*Perhaps, but it is an open question,* STEVE *is the one who is most surprised to hear this. He seems to want to say something on the subject, but a look of entreaty from* ALICE *silences him.*)

COLONEL. Alice, did you hear her?

ALICE. Surely you don't mean, Robert, that you are not glad?

COLONEL (*incredulous*). Is that how *you* take it?

ALICE (*heart-broken*). How I take it! I am overjoyed. Don't you see how splendid it is; our old friend Steve.

COLONEL (*glaring at him*). Our old friend, Steve. (*As for* AMY, *that pale-faced lily, for the moment she stands disregarded. Never mind;* GINEVRA *will yet do her justice.*)

ALICE. Oh, happy day! (*Brazenly she takes* STEVE'S *two hands.*) Robert, he is to be our son.

COLONEL. You are very clever, Alice, but do you really think I believe that this is no shock to you? Oh, woman, why has this deception not struck you to the ground?

ALICE. Deception? Amy, Steve, I do believe he thinks that this is as much a surprise to me as it is to him! Why, Robert, I have known about it ever since I saw Amy alone this afternoon. She told me at once. Then in came Steve, and he—

COLONEL. Is it as bad as that?

ALICE. As what, dear?

COLONEL. That my wife must lie to me?

ALICE. Oh, Robert.

COLONEL. I am groping only, but I can see now that you felt there was something wrong from the first. How did you find out?

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ALICE (*imploringly*). Robert, they are engaged to be married; it was foolish of them not to tell you; but, oh, my dear, leave it at that.

COLONEL. Why did you ask Amy to follow us here?

ALICE. So that we could all be together when we broke it to you, dear.

COLONEL. Another lie! My shoulders are broad; why shouldn't I have it to bear as well as you?

ALICE. There is nothing to bear but just a little folly.

COLONEL. Folly! And neither of them able to say a word?

(*Indeed they are very cold lovers;* AMY'S *lip is curled at* STEVE. *To make matters worse, the cupboard door, which has so far had the decency to remain quiet, now presumes to have its say. It opens of itself a few inches, creaking guiltily. Three people are so startled that a new suspicion is roused in the fourth.*)

ALICE (*who can read his face so well*). She wasn't there, Robert, she wasn't.

COLONEL. My God! I understand now; she didn't follow us; she hid there when I came.

ALICE. No, Robert, no.

(*He goes into the cupboard and returns with something in his hand, which he gives to* AMY.)

COLONEL. Your other glove, Amy.

ALICE. I can't keep it from you any longer, Robert; I have done my best. (*She goes to* AMY *to protect her.*) But Amy is still my child.

(*'What a deceiver,'* AMY *is thinking.*)

COLONEL. Well, sir, still waiting for that interview with my wife before you can say anything?

STEVE (*a desperate fellow*). Yes.

ALICE. You will have every opportunity of explaining, Steve, many opportunities; but in the meantime —just now, please go, leave us alone. (*Stamping her foot*) Go, please.

(STEVE *has had such an evening of it that he clings dizzily to the one amazing explanation, that* ALICE *loves him not wisely but too well. Never will he betray her, never.*)

STEVE (*with a meaning that is lost on her but is very evident to the other lady present*). Anything *you* ask me to do, Alice, anything. I shall go upstairs only, so that if you want me—

ALICE. Oh, go. (*He goes, wondering whether he is a villain or a hero, which is perhaps a pleasurable state of mind.*)

COLONEL. You are wondrous lenient to him; I shall have more to say. As for this girl—look at her standing there, she seems rather proud of herself.

ALICE. It isn't really hardness, Robert. It is because she thinks that you are hard. Robert, dear, I want

you to go away too, and leave Amy to me. Go home, Robert; we shall follow soon.

COLONEL (*after a long pause*). If you wish it.

ALICE. Leave her to her mother.

(*When he has gone* AMY *leans across the top of a chair, sobbing her little heart away.* ALICE *tries to take her—the whole of her—in her arms, but is rebuffed with a shudder.*)

AMY. I wonder you can touch me.

ALICE. The more you ask of your mother the more she has to give. It is my love you need, Amy; and you can draw upon it, and draw upon it.

AMY. Pray excuse me.

ALICE. How can you be so hard! My child, I am not saying one harsh word to you. I am asking you only to hide your head upon your mother's breast.

AMY. I decline.

ALICE. Take care, Amy, or I shall begin to believe that your father was right. What do you think would happen if I were to leave you to him!

AMY. Poor father!

ALICE. Poor indeed with such a daughter.

AMY. He has gone, mother; so do you really think you need keep up this pretence before me?

ALICE. Amy, what you need is a whipping.

AMY. You ought to know what I need.

(*The agonised mother again tries to envelop her unnatural child.*)

ALICE. Amy, Amy, it was all Steve's fault.

AMY (*struggling as with a boa constrictor*). You needn't expect me to believe that.

ALICE. No doubt you thought at the beginning that he was a gallant gentleman.

AMY. Not at all; I knew he was depraved from the moment I set eyes on him.

ALICE. My Amy! Then how—how—

AMY. Ginevra knew too.

ALICE. She knew!

AMY. We planned it together—to treat him in the same way as Sir Harry Paskill and Ralph Devereux.

ALICE. Amy, you are not in your senses. You don't mean that there were others?

AMY. There was Major—Major—I forget his name, but he was another.

ALICE (*shaking her*). Wretched girl.

AMY. Leave go.

ALICE. How did you get to know them?

AMY. To know them? They are characters in plays.

ALICE (*bereft*). Characters in plays? Plays!

AMY. We went to five last week.

(*Wild hopes spring up in* ALICE'S *breast.*)

ALICE. Amy, tell me quickly, when did you see Steve for the first time?

AMY. When you were saying good-bye to him this afternoon.

ALICE. Can it be true?

AMY. Perhaps we shouldn't have listened; but they always listen when there is a screen.

ALICE. Listened? What did you hear?

AMY. Everything, mother! We saw him kiss you and heard you make an assignation to meet him here.

ALICE. I'll whip you directly; but go on, darling.

AMY (*childishly*). You shan't whip me. (*Then once more heroic*) As in a flash Ginevra and I saw that there was only one way to save you. I must go to his chambers, and force him to return the letters.

ALICE (*inspired*). My letters?

AMY. Of course. He behaved at first as they all do —pretended that he did not know what I was talking about. At that moment, a visitor; I knew at once that it must be the husband; it always is, it was; I hid. Again a visitor. I knew it must be you, it was; oh, the agony to me in there. I was wondering when he would begin to suspect, for I knew the time would come, and I stood ready to emerge and sacrifice myself to save you.

ALICE. As you have done, Amy?

AMY. As I have done.

(*Once more the arms go round her.*)

I want none of that.

ALICE. Forgive me. (*A thought comes to* ALICE *that enthralls her.*) Steve! Does he know what you think—about me?

AMY. I had to be open with him.

ALICE. And Steve believes it? He thinks that I—I—Alice Grey—oh, ecstasy!

AMY. You need not pretend.

ALICE. What is to be done?

AMY. Though I abhor him I must marry him for aye. Ginevra is to be my only bridesmaid. We are both to wear black.

ALICE (*sharply*). You are sure you don't rather like him, Amy?

AMY. Mother!

ALICE. Amy, weren't you terrified to come alone to the rooms of a man you didn't even know? Some men—

AMY. I was not afraid. I am a soldier's daughter; and Ginevra gave me this.

(*She produces a tiny dagger. This is altogether too much for* ALICE.)

ALICE. My darling!

(*She does have the babe in her arms at last, and now* AMY *clings to her. This is very sweet to* ALICE; *but she knows that if she tells* AMY *the truth at once its first effect will be to make the dear one feel ridiculous. How can* ALICE *hurt her* AMY *so,* AMY *who has such pride in having saved her?*)

You do love me a little, Amy, don't you?

AMY. Yes, yes.

ALICE. You don't think I have been really bad, dear?

AMY. Oh, no, only foolish.

ALICE. Thank you, Amy.

AMY (*nestling still closer*). What are we to do now, dear, dear mother?

(ALICE *has a happy idea; but that, as the novelists say, deserves a chapter to itself.*)

ACT III

We are back in the room of the diary. The diary itself is not visible; it is tucked away in the drawer, taking a nap while it may, for it has much to chronicle before cockcrow. Cosmo also is asleep, on an ingenious arrangement of chairs. Ginevra is sitting bolt upright, a book on her knee, but she is not reading it. She is seeing visions in which Amy plays a desperate part. The hour is late; every one ought to be in bed.

Cosmo is perhaps dreaming that he is back at Osborne, for he calls out, as if in answer to a summons, that he is up and nearly dressed. He then raises his head and surveys Ginevra.

COSMO. Hullo, you've been asleep.

GINEVRA. How like a man.

COSMO. I say, I thought you were the one who had stretched herself out, and that I was sitting here very quiet, so as not to waken you.

GINEVRA. Let us leave it at that.

COSMO. Huffy, aren't you! Have they not come back yet?

GINEVRA. Not they. And half-past eleven has

struck. I oughtn't to stay any longer; as it is, I don't know what my landlady will say.

(*She means that she does know.*)

COSMO. I'll see you to your place whenever you like. My uniform will make it all right for you.

GINEVRA. You child. But I simply can't go on till I know what has happened. Where, oh where, can they be?

COSMO. That's all right. Father told you he had a message from mother saying that they had gone to the theatre.

GINEVRA. But why?

COSMO. Yes, it seemed to bother him, too.

GINEVRA. The theatre. That is what she *said*.

(*Here* COSMO *takes up a commanding position on the hearth-rug; it could not be bettered unless with a cigar in the mouth.*)

COSMO. Look here, Miss Dunbar, it may be that I have a little crow to pick with mother when she comes back, but I cannot allow any one else to say a word against her. *Comprenez?*

(GINEVRA'S *reply is lost to the world because at this moment* AMY'S *sparkling eyes show round the door. How softly she must have crossed the little hall!*)

GINEVRA. Amy, at last!

AMY. Sh! (*She speaks to some one unseen*) There are only Ginevra and Cosmo here.

(*Thus encouraged* ALICE *enters. Despite her demeanour they would see, if they knew her better, that she has been having a good time, and is in hopes that it is not ended yet. She comes in, as it were, under* AMY'S *guidance.* GINEVRA *is introduced, and* ALICE *then looks to* AMY *for instructions what to do next.*)

AMY (*encouragingly*). Sit down, mother.

ALICE. Where shall I sit, dear? (AMY *gives her the nicest chair in the room.*) Thank you, Amy. (*She is emboldened to address her son.*) Where is your father, Cosmo?

(COSMO *remembers his slap, and that he has sworn to converse with her no more. He indicates, however, that his father is in the room overhead.* ALICE *meekly accepts the rebuff.*) Shall I go to him, Amy?

AMY (*considerately*). If you think you feel strong enough, mother.

ALICE. You have given me strength.

AMY. I am so glad. (*She strokes her mother soothingly.*) *What* will you tell him?

ALICE. All, Amy—all, all.

AMY. Brave mother.

ALICE. Who could not be brave with such a daughter! (*On reflection*) And with such a son!

(*Helped by encouraging words from* AMY *she departs on her perilous enterprise. The two con-*

spirators would now give a handsome competence to COSMO *to get him out of the room. He knows it, and sits down.*)

COSMO. I say, what is she going to tell father?

AMY (*with a despairing glance at* GINEVRA). Oh, nothing.

GINEVRA (*with a clever glance at* AMY). Cosmo, you promised to see me home.

COSMO (*the polite*). Right-o!

GINEVRA. But you haven't got your boots on.

COSMO. I won't be a minute. (*He pauses at the door.*) I say, I believe you're trying to get rid of me. Look here, I won't budge till you tell me what mother is speaking about to father.

AMY. It is about the drawing-room curtains.

COSMO. Good Lord!

(*As soon as he has gone they rush at each other; they don't embrace; they stop when their noses are an inch apart, and then talk. This is the stage way for lovers. It is difficult to accomplish without rubbing noses, but they have both been practising.*)

GINEVRA. Quick, Amy, did you get the letters?

AMY. There are no letters.

(GINEVRA *is so taken aback that her nose bobs. Otherwise the two are absolutely motionless. She cleverly recovers herself.*)

GINEVRA. No letters; how unlike life. You are quite sure?

AMY. I have my mother's word for it.

GINEVRA. Is that enough?

AMY. And you now have mine.

GINEVRA. Then it hadn't gone far?

AMY. No, merely a painful indiscretion. But if father had known it—you know what husbands are.

GINEVRA. Yes, indeed. Did he follow her? (AMY *nods.*) Did you hide? (AMY *nods again.*)

AMY. Worse than that, Ginevra. To deceive him I had to pretend that I was the woman. And now—Ginevra, can you guess—?

(*Here they have to leave off doing noses. On the stage it can be done for ever so much longer, but only by those who are paid accordingly.*)

GINEVRA. You don't mean—?

AMY. I think I do, but what do you mean?

GINEVRA. I mean—the great thing.

AMY. Then it is, yes. Ginevra, I am affianced to the man, Steve!

(GINEVRA *could here quickly drink a glass of water if there was one in the room.*)

GINEVRA (*wandering round her old friend*). You seem the same, Amy, yet somehow different.

AMY (*rather complacently*). That is just how I feel. But I must not think of myself. They are over-

head, Ginevra. There is an awful scene taking place —up there. She is telling father all.

GINEVRA. Confessing?

AMY. Everything—in a noble attempt to save me from a widowed marriage.

GINEVRA. But I thought she was such a hard woman.

AMY. Not really. To the world perhaps; but I have softened her. All she needed, Ginevra, to bring out her finer qualities was a strong nature to lean upon; and she says that she has found it in me. At the theatre and all the way home—

GINEVRA. Then you did go to the theatre? Why?

AMY (*feeling that* GINEVRA *is very young*). Need you ask? Oh, Ginevra, to see if we could find a happy ending. It was mother's idea.

GINEVRA. Which theatre?

AMY. I don't know, but the erring wife confessed all—in one of those mousselines-de-soie that are so fashionable this year; and mother and I sat—clasping each other's hands, praying it might end happily, though we didn't see how it could.

GINEVRA. How awful for you. What did the husband do?

AMY. He was very calm and white. He went out of the room for a moment, and came back so white. Then he sat down by the fire, and nodded his head three times.

GINEVRA. I think I know now which theatre it was.

AMY. He asked her coldly—but always the perfect gentleman—

GINEVRA. Oh, that theatre!

AMY. He asked her whether *he* was to go or she.

GINEVRA. They must part?

AMY. Yes. She went on her knees to him, and said, 'Are we never to meet again?' and he replied huskily, 'Never.' Then she turned and went slowly towards the door.

GINEVRA (*clutching her*). Amy, was that the end?

AMY. The audience sat still as death, listening for the awful *click* that brings the curtain down.

GINEVRA (*shivering*). I seem to hear it.

AMY. At that moment—

GINEVRA. Yes, yes?

AMY. The door opened, and, Ginevra, their little child—came in—in her night-gown.

GINEVRA. Quick.

AMY. She came toddling down the stairs—she was barefooted—she took in the whole situation at a glance—and, running to her father, she said, 'Daddy, if mother goes away what is to become of me?' (AMY *gulps and continues.*) And then she took a hand of each and drew them together till they fell on each other's breasts, and then—oh, Ginevra, then—click! —and the curtain fell.

GINEVRA (*when they are more composed*). How old was the child?

AMY. Five. She looked more.

GINEVRA (*her brows knitted*). Molly is under two, isn't she?

AMY. She is not quite twenty months.

GINEVRA. She couldn't possibly do it.

AMY. No; I thought of that. But she couldn't, you know, even though she was held up. Mother couldn't help thinking the scene was a good omen, though. (*They both look at the ceiling again.*) How still they are.

GINEVRA. Perhaps she hasn't had the courage to tell.

AMY. If so, I must go on with it.

GINEVRA (*feeling rather small beside* AMY). Marry him?

AMY. Yes. I must dree my weird. Is it dree your weird, or weird your dree?

GINEVRA. I think they both do. (*She does not really care; nobler thoughts are surging within her.*) Amy, why can't I make some sacrifice as well as you?

(AMY *seems about to make a somewhat grudging reply, but the unexpected arrival of the man who has so strangely won her seals her lips.*)

AMY. You! (*with a depth of meaning*). Oh, sir!

STEVE (*the most nervous of the company*). I felt I

must come. Miss Grey, I am in the greatest distress, as the unhappy cause of all this trouble.

AMY (*coldly*). You should have thought of that before.

STEVE. It was dense of me not to understand sooner—very dense. (*He looks at her with wistful eyes.*) Must I marry you, Miss Grey?

AMY (*curling her lip*). Ah, that is what you are sorry for!

STEVE. Yes—horribly sorry. (*Hastily*) Not for myself. To tell you the truth, I'd be—precious glad to risk it—I think.

AMY (*with a glance at* GINEVRA). You would?

STEVE. But very sorry for you. It seems such a shame to you—so young and attractive—and the little you know of me so—unfortunate.

AMY. You mean you could never love me?

STEVE. I don't mean that at all.

AMY. Ginevra!

(*Indeed* GINEVRA *feels that she has been obliterated quite long enough.*)

GINEVRA (*with a touch of testiness in her tone*). Amy—introduce me.

AMY. Mr. Stephen Rollo—Miss Dunbar. Miss Dunbar knows all.

(GINEVRA *makes a movement that the cynical might describe as brushing* AMY *aside.*)

GINEVRA. May I ask, Mr. Rollo, what are your views about woman?

STEVE. Really I—

GINEVRA. Is she, in your opinion, her husband's equal, or is she his chattel?

STEVE. Honestly, I am so beside myself—

GINEVRA. You evade the question.

AMY. He means chattel, Ginevra.

GINEVRA. Mr. Rollo, I am the friend till death of Amy Grey. Let that poor child go, sir, and I am prepared to take her place beside you—yes, at the altar's mouth.

AMY. Ginevra.

GINEVRA (*making that movement again*). Understand I can neither love nor honour you—at least at first—but I will obey you.

AMY. Ginevra, you take too much upon yourself.

GINEVRA. I *will* make a sacrifice—I will.

AMY. You shall not.

GINEVRA. I feel that I understand this gentleman as no other woman can. It is my mission, Amy—

(*The return of* ALICE *is what prevents* STEVE'S *seizing his hat and flying. It might not have had this effect had he seen the lady's face just before she opened the door.*)

ALICE (*putting her hand to her poor heart*). You have come here, Steve? Oh no, it is not possible.

STEVE (*looking things unutterable*). How could I help coming?

AMY (*to the rescue*). Mother, have you—did you?

ALICE (*meekly*). I have told him all.

STEVE. The Colonel?

(ALICE *bows her bruised head.*)

AMY (*conducting her to a seat*). Brave, brave. What has he decided?

ALICE. He hasn't decided yet. He is thinking out what it will be best to do.

STEVE. He knows? Then I am no longer— (*His unfinished sentence seems to refer to* AMY.)

AMY (*proudly*). Yes, sir, as he knows, you are, as far as I am concerned, now free.

GINEVRA (*in a murmur*). It's almost a pity. (*She turns to her* AMY) At least, Amy, this makes you and me friends again.

(*We have never quite been able to understand what this meant, but* AMY *knows, for she puts* GINEVRA'S *hand to her sweet lips.*)

ALICE (*who somehow could do without* GINEVRA *to-night*). Cosmo is waiting for you, Miss Dunbar, to see you home.

GINEVRA (*with a disquieting vision of her landlady*). I must go. (*She gives her hand in the coldest way to* MRS. GREY. *Then, with a curtsey to* STEVE *that he can surely never forget*) Mr. Rollo, I am sure there

is much good in you. Darling Amy, I shall be round first thing in the morning.

STEVE. Now that she has gone, can we—have a talk?

ALICE (*looking down*). Yes, Steve.

AMY (*gently*). Mother, what was that you called him?

ALICE. Dear Amy, I forgot. Yes, Mr. Rollo.

STEVE. Then, Alice—

AMY. This lady's name, if I am not greatly mistaken, is Mrs. Grey. Is it not so, mother?

ALICE. Yes, Amy.

STEVE. As you will; but it is most important that I say certain things to her at once.

ALICE. Oh, Mr. Rollo. What do you think, dear?

AMY (*reflecting*). If it be clearly understood that this is good-bye, I consent. Please be as brief as possible.

(*Somehow they think that she is moving to the door, but she crosses only to the other side of the room and sits down with a book. One of them likes this very much.*)

STEVE (*who is not the one*). But I want to see her alone.

AMY (*the dearest of little gaolers*). That, I am afraid, I cannot permit. It is not that I have not perfect confidence in you, mother, but you must see I am acting wisely.

ALICE. Yes, Amy.

STEVE (*to his* ALICE). What has come over you? You don't seem to be the same woman.

AMY. That is just it; she is not.

ALICE. I see now only through Amy's eyes.

AMY. They will not fail you, mother. Proceed, sir.

(STEVE *has to make the best of it.*)

STEVE. You told him, then, about your feelings for me?

ALICE (*studying the carpet*). He knows now exactly what are my feelings for you.

STEVE (*huskily*). How did he take it?

ALICE. Need you ask?

STEVE. Poor old boy. I suppose he wishes me to stay away from your house now.

ALICE. Is it unreasonable?

STEVE. No, of course not, but—

ALICE. Will it be terribly hard to you, St—Mr. Rollo?

STEVE. It isn't that. You see I'm fond of the Colonel, I really am, and it hurts me to think he thinks that I— It wasn't my fault, was it?

AMY. Ungenerous.

ALICE. He quite understands that it was I who lost my head.

(STEVE *is much moved by the generosity of this. He lowers his voice.*)

STEVE. Of course I blame myself now; but I assure you honestly I had no idea of it until to-night. I had thought you were only my friend. It dazed me; but as I ransacked my mind many little things came back to me. I remembered what I hadn't noticed at the time—

AMY. Louder, please.

STEVE. I remembered—

AMY. Is this necessary?

ALICE. Please, Amy, let me know what he remembered.

STEVE. I remembered that your voice was softer to me than when you were addressing other men.

ALICE. Let me look long at you, Mr. Rollo. (*She looks long at him.*)

AMY. Mother, enough.

ALICE. What more do you remember?

STEVE. It is strange to me now that I didn't understand your true meaning to-day when you said I was the only man you couldn't flirt with; you meant that I aroused deeper feelings.

ALICE. How you know me.

AMY. Not the best of you, mother.

ALICE. No, not the best, Amy.

STEVE. I can say that I never thought of myself as possessing dangerous qualities. I thought I was utterly unattractive to women.

ALICE. You *must* have known about your eyes.

STEVE (*eagerly*). My eyes? On my soul I didn't.

(AMY *wonders if this can be true.* ALICE *rises. she feels that she cannot control herself much longer.*)

ALICE. Steve, if you don't go away at once I shall scream.

STEVE (*really unhappy*). Is it as bad as that?

AMY (*rising*). You heard what Mrs. Grey said. This is very painful to her. Will you please say good-bye.

(*In the novel circumstances he does not quite know how this should be carried out.*)

ALICE (*also shy*). How shall we do it, Amy? On the brow?

AMY. No, mother—with the hand.

(*They do it with the hand, and it is thus that the* COLONEL *finds them. He would be unable to keep his countenance were it not for a warning look from* ALICE.)

COLONEL (*one of the men who have a genius for saying the right thing*). Ha!

STEVE. I am going, Colonel. I am very sorry that you— At the same time I wish you to understand that the fault is entirely mine.

COLONEL (*guardedly*). Ha!

AMY (*putting an arm round her mother, who hugs it*). Father, he came only to say good-bye. He is not a bad man, and mother has behaved magnificently.

COLONEL (*cleverly*). Ha!

AMY. You must not, you shall not, be cruel to her.

ALICE. Darling Amy!

COLONEL (*truculently*). Oh, mustn't I? We shall see about that.

STEVE. Come, come, Colonel.

COLONEL (*doing better than might have been expected*). Hold your tongue, sir.

AMY. I know mother as no other person can know her. I begin to think that you have no proper appreciation of her, father.

ALICE (*basely*). Dear, dear Amy.

AMY. I dare say she has often suffered in the past—

ALICE. Oh, Amy, oh.

AMY. By your—your callousness—vour want of sympathy—your neglect.

ALICE. My beloved child.

COLONEL (*uneasily*). Alice, tell her it isn't so.

ALICE. You hear what he says, my pet.

AMY. But you don't deny it.

COLONEL. Deny it, woman.

ALICE. Robert, Robert!

AMY. And please not to call my mother 'woman' in my presence.

COLONEL. I—I—I— (*He looks for help from* ALICE, *but she gives him only a twinkle of triumph. He barks*) Child, go to your room.

AMY (*her worst fears returning*). But what are you going to do?

COLONEL. That is not your affair.

STEVE. I must say I don't see that.

AMY (*gratefully*). Thank you, Mr. Rollo.

COLONEL. Go to your room.

(*She has to go, but not till she has given her mother a kiss that is a challenge to the world. Then to the bewilderment of* STEVE *two human frames are rocked with laughter.*)

ALICE. Oh, Robert, look at him. He thinks I worship him.

COLONEL. Steve, you colossal puppy.

STEVE. Eh—what—why?

ALICE. Steve, tell Robert about my voice being softer to you than to other men; tell him, Steve, about your eyes.

(*The unhappy youth gropes mentally and physically.*)

STEVE. Good heavens, was there nothing in it?

COLONEL. My boy, I'll never let you hear the end of this.

STEVE. But if there's nothing in it, how could your daughter have thought—

COLONEL. She saw you kiss Alice here this afternoon, you scoundrel, and, as she thought, make an *assignation* with you. There, it all came out of that.

She is a sentimental lady, is our Amy, and she has been too often to the theatre.

STEVE. Let me think.

COLONEL. Here is a chair for the very purpose. Now, think hard.

STEVE. But—but—then why did you pretend before her, Alice?

ALICE. Because she thinks that she has saved me, and it makes her so happy. Amy has a passionate desire to be of some use in this world she knows so well, and she already sees her sphere, Steve: it is to look after me. I am not to be her chaperone, it is she who is to be mine. I have submitted, you see.

COLONEL (*fidgeting*). She seems to have quite given me up for you.

ALICE (*blandly*). Oh yes, Robert, quite.

STEVE (*gloomily*). You will excuse my thinking only of myself. What an ass I've been.

ALICE. Is it a blow, Steve?

STEVE. It's a come-down. Ass, ass, ass! But I say, Alice, I'm awfully glad it's I who have been the ass and not you. I really am, Colonel. You see the tragedy of my life is I'm such an extraordinarily ordinary sort of fellow that, though every man I know says some lady has loved him, there never in all my unromantic life was a woman who cared a Christmas card for me. It often makes me lonely; and so when I thought such a glorious woman as you, Alice—I lost

touch of earth altogether; but now I've fallen back on it with a whack. But I'm glad—yes, I'm glad. You two kindest people Steve Rollo has ever known. —Oh, I say good-night. I suppose you can't overlook it, Alice.

ALICE. Oh yes, you goose, I can. We are both fond of you—Mr. Rollo.

COLONEL. Come in, my boy, and make love to *me* as often as you feel lonely.

STEVE. I may still come to see you? I say, I'm awfully taken with your Amy.

COLONEL. None of that, Steve.

ALICE. *We* can drop in on you on the sly, Steve, to admire your orbs; but you mustn't come here—until Amy thinks it is safe for me. (*When he has gone she adds*) Until *I* think it is safe for Amy.

COLONEL. When will that be?

ALICE. Not for some time.

COLONEL. He isn't a bad sort, Steve.

ALICE. Oh, no—she might even do worse some day. But she is to be my little girl for a long time first.

COLONEL. This will give him a sort of glamour to her, you know.

ALICE. You are not really thinking, Robert, that my Amy is to fall asleep to-night before she hears the whole true story. Could I sleep until she knows everything!

COLONEL. Stupid of me. I am a little like Steve in one way, though; I don't understand why you have kept it up so long.

ALICE. It isn't the first time you have thought me a harum-scarum.

COLONEL. It isn't.

ALICE. The sheer fun of it, Robert, went to my head, I suppose. And then, you see, the more Amy felt herself to be my protectress the more she seemed to love me. I am afraid I have a weakness for the short-cuts to being loved.

COLONEL. I'm afraid you have. The one thing you didn't think of is that the more she loves you the less love she seems to have for me.

ALICE. How selfish of you, Robert.

COLONEL (*suspiciously*). Or was that all part of the plan?

ALICE. There was no plan; there wasn't time for one. But you were certainly rather horrid, Robert, in the way you gloated over me when you saw them take to you. I have been gloating a little perhaps in taking them from you.

COLONEL. Them? You are going a little too fast, my dear. I have still got Cosmo and Molly.

ALICE. For the moment.

COLONEL. Woman.

ALICE. Remember, Amy said you must not call me that.

(*He laughs as he takes her by the shoulders.*) Yes, shake me; I deserve it.

COLONEL. You do indeed (*and he shakes her with a ferocity that would have startled any sudden visitor. No wonder, then, that it is a shock to* COSMO, *who comes blundering in.* ALICE *is the first to see him, and she turns the advantage to unprincipled account.*)

ALICE. Robert, don't hurt me. Oh, if Cosmo were to see you!

COSMO. Cosmo does see him. (*He says it in a terrible voice. Probably* COSMO *has been to a theatre or two himself.*)

ALICE. You here, Cosmo!

(*She starts back from her assailant.*)

COLONEL (*feeling a little foolish*). I didn't hear you come in.

COSMO (*grimly*). No, I'm sure you didn't.

COLONEL (*testily*). No heroics, my boy.

COSMO. Take care, father. (*He stands between them, which makes his father suddenly grin.*) Laugh on, sir. I don't know what this row's about, but—(*here his arm encircles an undeserving lady*)—this lady is my mother, and I won't have her bullied. What's a father compared to a mother!

ALICE. Cosmo, darling Cosmo!

COLONEL (*becoming alarmed*). My boy, it was only a jest. Alice, tell him it was only a jest.

ALICE. He says it was only a jest, Cosmo.

COSMO. You are a trump to shield him, mother. (*He kisses her openly, conscious that he is a bit of a trump himself, in which view* ALICE *most obviously concurs.*)

COLONEL (*to his better half*). You serpent.

COSMO. Sir, this language won't do.

COLONEL (*exasperated*). You go to bed, too.

ALICE. He has sent Amy to bed already. Try to love your father, Cosmo (*placing many kisses on the spot where he had been slapped*). Try for my sake, and try to get Amy and Molly to do it, too. (*Sweetly to her husband*) They will love you in time, Robert; at present they can think only of me. Darling, I'll come and see you in bed.

COSMO. I don't like to leave you with him—

ALICE. Go, my own; I promise to call out if I need you.

(*On these terms* COSMO *departs. The long-suffering husband, arms folded, surveys his unworthy spouse.*)

COLONEL. You *are* a hussy.

ALICE (*meekly*). I suppose I am.

COLONEL. Mind you, I am not going to stand Cosmo's thinking this of me.

ALICE. As if I would allow it for another hour! You won't see much of me to-night, Robert. If I sleep at all it will be in Amy's room.

COLONEL (*lugubriously*). You will be taking Molly from me to-morrow.

ALICE. I feel hopeful that Molly, too, will soon be taking care of me. (*She goes to him in her cajoling way.*) With so many chaperones, Robert, I ought to do well. Oh, my dear, don't think that I have learnt no lesson to-night.

COLONEL (*smiling*). Going to reform at last?

ALICE (*the most serious of women*). Yes, Robert. The Alice you have known is come to an end. To-morrow—

COLONEL. If she is different to-morrow I'll disown her.

ALICE. It's summer done, autumn begun. Farewell, summer, we don't know you any more. My girl and I are like the little figures in the weather-house; when Amy comes out, Alice goes in. Alice Sit-by-the-Fire henceforth. The moon is full to-night, Robert, but it isn't looking for me any more. Taxis farewell—advance four-wheelers. I had a beautiful husband once, black as the raven was his hair—

COLONEL. Stop it.

ALICE. Pretty Robert, farewell. Farewell, Alice that was; it's all over, my dear. I always had a weakness for you; but now you must really go; make way there for the old lady.

COLONEL. Woman, you'll make me cry. Go to your Amy.

ALICE. Robert—

COLONEL. Go. Go. Go!

(*As he roars it* AMY *peeps in anxiously. She is in her night-gown, and her hair is down and her feet are bare, and she does not look so very much more than five.* ALICE *is unable to resist the temptation.*)

ALICE (*wailing*). Must I go, Robert?

AMY. Going away? Mother! Father, if mother goes away, what is to become of me?

(*She draws them together until their hands clasp. There is now a beatific smile on her face. The curtain sees that its time has come; it clicks, and falls.*)

PANTALOON

PANTALOON

The scene makes believe to be the private home of Pantaloon and Columbine, though whether they ever did have a private home is uncertain.

In the English version (and with that alone are we concerning ourselves) these two were figures in the harlequinade, which in Victorian days gave a finish to pantomime as vital as a tail to a dog. Now they are vanished from the boards; or at best they wander through the canvas streets, in everybody's way, at heart afraid of their own policeman, really dead, and waiting, like the faithful old horse, for some one to push them over. Here at the theatre is perhaps a scrap of Columbine's skirt, torn off as she squeezed through the wings for the last time, or even placed there intentionally by her as a souvenir: Columbine to her public, a kiss hanging on a nail.

They are very illusive. One has to toss to find out what was their relation to each other: whether Pantaloon, for instance, was Columbine's father. He was an old, old urchin of the streets over whom some fairy wand had been waved, rather carelessly, and this makes him a child of art; now we must all be nice to children of art, and the nicest thing we can do for

Pantaloon is to bring the penny down heads and give him a delightful daughter. So Columbine was Pantaloon's daughter.

It would be cruel to her to make her his wife, because then she could not have a love-affair.

The mother is dead, to give the little home a touch of pathos.

We have now proved that Pantaloon and his daughter did have a home, and as soon as we know that, we know more. We know, for instance, that as half a crown seemed almost a competency to them, their home must have been in a poor locality and conveniently small. We know also that the sitting-room and kitchen combined must have been on the ground floor. We know it, because in the harlequinade they were always flying from the policeman or bashing his helmet, and Pantaloon would have taken ill with a chamber that was not easily commanded by the policeman on his beat. Even Columbine, we may be sure, refined as she was and incapable of the pettiest larceny, liked the homely feeling of dodging the policeman's eye as she sat at meals. Lastly, we know that directly opposite the little home was a sausage-shop, the pleasantest of all sights to Pantaloon, who, next to his daughter, loved a sausage. It is being almost too intimate to tell that Columbine hated sausages; she hated them as a literary hand's daughter might hate manuscripts. But like a loving child

she never told her hate, and spent great part of her time toasting sausages to a turn before the fire, and eating her own one bravely when she must, but concealing it in the oddest places when she could.

We should now be able to reconstitute Pantaloon's parlour. It is agreeably stuffy, with two windows and a recess between them, from which one may peep both ways for the policeman. The furniture is in horse-hair, no rents showing, because careful Columbine has covered them with antimacassars. All the chairs (but not the sofa) are as sound of limb as they look except one, and Columbine, who is as light as an air balloon, can sit on this one even with her feet off the floor. Though the time is summer there is a fire burning, so that Pantaloon need never eat his sausages raw, which he might do inadvertently if Columbine did not take them gently from his hand. There is a cosy round table with a waxcloth cover adhering to it like a sticking-plaster, and this table is set for tea. Histrionic dignity is given to the room by a large wicker trunk in which Pantaloon's treasures are packed when he travels by rail, and on it is a printed intimation that he is one of the brightest wits on earth. Columbine could be crushed, concertina-like, into half of this trunk, and it may be that she sometimes travels thus to save her ticket. Between the windows hangs a glass case, such as those at inns wherein Piscator preserves his stuffed pike, but this

one contains a poker. It is interesting to note that Pantaloon is sufficiently catholic in his tastes to spare a favourable eye for other arts than his own. There are various paintings on the walls, all of himself, with the exception of a small one of his wife. These represent him not in humorous act but for all time, as, for instance, leaning on a bracket and reading a book, with one finger laid lightly against his nose.

So far our work of reconstitution has been easy, but we now come to the teaser. In all these pictures save one (to be referred to in its proper place) Pantaloon is presented not on the stage but in private life, yet he is garbed and powdered as we know him in the harlequinade. If they are genuine portraits, therefore, they tell us something profoundly odd about the home life of Pantaloon; nothing less than this, that as he was on the stage, so he was off it, clothes, powder, and all; he was not acting a part in the harlequinade, he was merely being himself. It was undoubtedy this strange discovery that set us writing a play about him.

Of course, bitter controversy may come of this, for not every one will agree that we are right. It is well known among the *cognoscenti* that actors in general are not the same off the stage as on; that they dress for their parts, speak words written for them which they do not necessarily believe, and afterwards wash the whole thing off and then go to clubs and coolly

cross their legs. I accept this to be so (though I think it a pity), but Pantaloon was never an actor in their sense; he would have scorned to speak words written for him by any whippersnapper; what he said and did before the footlights were the result of mature conviction and represented his philosophy of life. It is the more easy to believe this of him because we are so anxious to believe it of Columbine. Otherwise she could not wear her pretty skirts in our play, and that would be unbearable.

If this noble and simple consistency was the mark of Pantaloon and Columbine (as we have now proved up to the hilt), it must have distinguished no less the other members of the harlequinade. There were two others, the Harlequin and the Clown.

In far-back days, when the world was so young that pieces of the original egg-shell still adhered to it, one boy was so desperately poor that he alone of children could not don fancy dress on fair-days. Presently the other children were sorry for this drab one, so each of them clipped a little bit off his own clothing and gave it to him. These were sewn together and made into a costume for him, by the jolly little tailors who in our days have quite gone out, and that is why Harlequin has come down to us in patchwork. He was a lovely boy with no brains at all (not that this matters), while the Clown was all brain.

It has been our whim to make Pantaloon and Co-

lumbine our chief figures, but we have had to go for them, as it were, to the kitchen; the true head of the harlequinade was the Clown. You could not become a clown by taking thought, you had to be born one. It was just a chance. If the Clown had wished to walk over the others they would have spread themselves on the ground so that he should be able to do it without inconveniencing himself. Any money they had they got from him, and it was usually pennies. If they displeased him he caned them. He had too much power and it brutalised him, as we shall see, but in fairness it should be told that he owed his supremacy entirely to his funniness. The family worshipped funniness, and he was the funniest.

It is not necessary for our play to reconstitute the homes of Harlequin and Clown, but it could be done. Harlequin, as a bachelor with no means but with a secret conviction that he was a gentleman, had a sitting-and-bed combined at the top of a house too near Jermyn Street for his purse. He made up by not eating very much, which was good for his figure. He always carried his wand, which had curious magical qualities—for instance, it could make him invisible; but in the street he seldom asked this of it, having indeed a friendly desire to be looked at. He had delightful manners and an honest heart. The Clown, who, of course, had appearances to keep up, knew the value of a good address, and undoubtedly lived in the

Cromwell Road. He smoked cigars with bands round them, and his togs were cut in Savile Row.

Clown and Pantaloon were a garrulous pair, but Columbine and Harlequin never spoke. I don't know whether they were what we call dumb. Perhaps if they had tried to talk with their tongues they could have done so, but they never thought of it. They were such exquisite dancers that they did all their talking with their legs. There is nothing that may be said which they could not express with this leg or that. It is the loveliest of all languages, and as soft as the fall of snow.

When the curtain rises we see Columbine alone in the little house, very happy and gay, for she has no notion that her tragic hour is about to strike. She is dressed precisely as we may have seen her on the stage. It is the pink skirt, the white one being usually kept for Sunday, which is also washing-day; and we almost wish this had been Sunday, just to show Columbine in white at the tub, washing the pink without letting a single soap-sud pop on to the white. She is toasting bread rhythmically by the fire, and hides the toasting-fork as the policeman passes suspiciously outside. Presently she is in a whirl of emotion because she has heard Harlequin's knock. She rushes to the window and hides (they were always hiding), she blows kisses, and in her excitement she is everywhere and nowhere at once, like a kitten that leaps at noth-

ing and stops half-way. She has the short quick steps of a bird on a lawn. Long before we have time to describe her movements she has bobbed out of sight beneath the table to await Harlequin funnily, for we must never forget that they are a funny family. With a whirl of his wand that is itself a dance, Harlequin makes the door fly open. He enters, says the stage direction, but what it means is that somehow he is now in the room. He probably knows that Columbine is beneath the table, as she hides so often and there are so few places in the room to hide in, but he searches for her elsewhere, even in a jug, to her extreme mirth, for of course she is peeping at him. He taps the wicker basket with his wand and the lid flies open. Still no Columbine! He sits dejectedly on a chair by the table, with one foot toward the spot where we last saw her head. This is irresistible. She kisses the foot. She is out from beneath the table now, and he is pursuing her round the room. They are as wayward as leaves in a gale. The cunning fellow pretends he does not want her, and now it is she who is pursuing him. There is something entrancing in his hand. It is a ring. It is the engagement-ring at last! She falters, she blushes, but she snatches at the ring. He tantalises her, holding it beyond her reach, but soon she has pulled down his hand and the ring is on her finger. They are dancing ecstatically when Pantaloon comes in and has to drop his stick because she

leaps into his arms. If she were not so flurried she would see that the aged man has brought excitement with him also.

PANTALOON. Ah, Fairy! Fond of her dad, is she? Sweetest little daughter ever an old 'un had. (*He sees* HARLEQUIN *and is genial to him, while* HARLEQUIN *pirouettes a How-d' ye-do.*) You here, Boy; welcome, Boy. (*He is about to remove his hat in the ordinary way, but* HARLEQUIN, *to save his prospective father-in-law any little trouble, waves his wand and the hat goes to rest on a door-peg. The little service so humbly tendered pleases* PANTALOON, *and he surveys* HARLEQUIN *with kindly condescension.*) Thank you, Boy. You are a good fellow, Boy, and an artist too, in your limited way, not here (*tapping his head*), not in a brainy way, but lower down (*thoughtfully, and including* COLUMBINE *in his downward survey*). That's where your personality lies—lower down. (*At the noble word personality* COLUMBINE *thankfully crosses herself, and then indicates that tea is ready.*) Tea, Fairy? I have such glorious news; but I will have a dish of tea first. You will join us, Boy? Sit down. (*They sit down to tea, the lovers exchanging shy, happy glances, but soon* PANTALOON *rises petulantly.*) Fairy, there are no sausages! Tea without a sausage. I am bitterly disappointed. And on a day, too, when I have great news. It's almost more

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than I can bear. No sausages! (*He is old and is near weeping, but* COLUMBINE *indicates with her personality that if he does not forgive her she must droop and die, and soon again he is a magnanimous father.*) Yes, yes, my pet, I forgive you. You can't abide sausages; nor can you, Boy. (*They hide their shamed heads.*) It's not your fault. Some are born with the instinct for a sausage, and some have it not. (*More brightly*) Would you like me to be funny now, my dear, or shall we have tea first? (*They prefer to have tea first, and the courteous old man sits down with them.*) But you do think me funny, don't you, Fairy? Neither of you can look at me without laughing, can you? Try, Boy; try, Fairy. (*They try, but fail. He is moved.*) Thank you both, thank you kindly. If the public only knew how anxiously we listen for the laugh they would be less grudging of it. (*Hastily*) Not that I have any cause of complaint. Every night I get the laugh from my generous patrons, the public, and always by legitimate means. When I think what a favourite I am I cannot keep my seat. (*He rises proudly.*) I am acknowledged by all in the know to be a funny old man. (*He moves about exultantly, looking at the portraits that are to hand him down to posterity.*) That picture of me, Boy, was painted to commemorate my being the second funniest man on earth. Of course Joey is the funniest, but I am the second fun-

niest. (*They have scarcely listened; they have been exchanging delicious glances with face and foot. But at mention of the* CLOWN *they shudder a little, and their hands seek each other for protection.*) This portrait I had took—done—in honour of your birth, my love. I call it 'The Old 'Un on First Hearing that He is a Father.' (*He chuckles long before another picture which represents him in the dress of ordinary people.*) This is me in fancy dress; it is how I went to a fancy-dress ball. Your mother, Fairy, was with me, in a long skirt! Very droll we must have looked, and very droll we felt. I call to mind we walked about in this way; the way the public walks, you know. (*In his gaiety he imitates the walk of the public, and roguish* COLUMBINE *imitates them also, but she loses her balance.*) Yes, try it. Don't flutter so much. Ah, it won't do, Fairy. Your natural way of walking's like a bird bobbing about on a lawn after worms. Your mother was the same, and when she got low in spirits I just blew her about the room till she was lively again. Blow Fairy about, Boy. (HARLEQUIN *blows her divinely about the room, against the wall, on to seats and off them, and for some sad happy moments* PANTALOON *gazes at her, feeling that his wife is alive again. They think it is the auspicious time to tell him of their love, but bashfulness falls upon them. He only sees that their faces shine.*) Ah, she is happy, my Fairy, but I have news

that will make her happier! (*Curiously*) Fairy, you look as if you had something you wanted to tell me. Have you news too? (*Tremblingly she extends her hand and shows him the ring on it. For a moment he misunderstands.*) A ring! Did *he* give you that? (*She nods rapturously.*) Oho, oho, this makes me so happy. I'll be funnier than ever, if possible. (*At this they dance gleefully, but his next words strike them cold.*) But, the rogue! He said he wanted me to speak to you about it first. That was my news. Oh, the rogue! (*They are scared, and sudden fear grips him.*) There's nothing wrong, is there? It was Joey gave you that ring, wasn't it, Fairy? (*She shakes her head, and the movement shakes tears from her eyes.*) If it wasn't Joey, who was it? (HARLEQUIN *steps forward.*) You! You are not fond of Boy, are you, Fairy? (*She is clinging to her lover now, and* PANTALOON *is a little dazed.*) But, my girl, Joey wants you. A clown wants you. When a clown wants you, you are not going to fling yourself away on a harlequin, are you? (*They go on their knees to him, and he is touched, but also frightened.*) Don't try to get round me; now don't. Joey would be angry with me. He can be hard when he likes, Joey can. (*In a whisper*) Perhaps he would cane me! You wouldn't like to see your dad caned, Fairy. (COLUMBINE'S *head sinks to the floor in woe, and* HARLEQUIN *eagerly waves his wand.*) Ah, Boy, you couldn't defy him. He is our

head. You can do wonderful things with that wand, but you can't fight Joey with it. (*Sadly enough the wand is lowered.*) You see, children, it won't do. You have no money, Boy, except the coppers Joey sometimes gives you in an envelope of a Friday night, and we can't marry without money (*with an attempt at joviality*), can't marry without money, Boy. (HARLEQUIN *with a rising chest produces money.*) Seven shillings and tenpence! You have been saving up, Boy. Well done! But it's not enough. (COLUMBINE *darts to the mantelshelf for her money-box and rattles it triumphantly.* PANTALOON *looks inside it.*) A half-crown and two sixpences! It won't do, children. I had a pound and a piano-case when I married, and yet I was pinched. (*They sit on the floor with their fingers to their eyes, and with difficulty he restrains an impulse to sit beside them.*) Poor souls! poor true love! (*The thought of Joey's power and greatness overwhelms him.*) Think of Joey's individuality, Fairy. He banks his money, my love. If you saw the boldness of Joey in the bank when he hands the slip across the counter and counts his money, my pet, instead of being thankful for whatever they give him. And then he puts out his tongue at them! The artist in him makes him put out his tongue at them. For he is a great artist, Joey. He is a greater artist than I am. I know it and I admit it. He has a touch that is beyond me. (*Imploringly*)

Did you say you would marry him, my love? (*She does not raise her head, and he continues with a new break in his voice.*) It is not his caning me I am so afraid of, but—but I'm oldish now, Fairy, even for an old 'un, and there is something I must tell you. I have tried to keep it from myself, but I know. It is this: I am afraid, my sweet, I am not so funny as I used to be. (*She encircles his knees in dissent.*) Yes, it's true, and Joey knows it. On Monday I had to fall into the barrel three times before I got the laugh. Joey saw! If Joey were to dismiss me I could never get another shop. I would be like a dog without a master. He has been my master so long. I have put by nearly enough to keep me, but oh, Fairy, the awfulness of not being famous any longer. Living on without seeing my kind friends in front. To think of my just being one of the public, of my being pointed at in the streets as the old 'un that was fired out of the company because he missed his laughs. And that's what Joey will bring to pass if you don't marry him, my girl. (*It is an appeal for mercy, and* COLUMBINE *is his loving daughter. Her face is wan, but she tries to smile. She hugs the ring to her breast, and then gives it back to* HARLEQUIN. *They try to dance a last embrace, but their legs are leaden. He kisses her cheeks and her foot and goes away broken-hearted. The brave girl puts her arm round her father's neck and hides her wet face. He could not*

look at it though it were exposed, for he has more to tell.) I haven't told you the worst yet, my love. I didn't dare to tell you the worst till Boy had gone. Fairy, the marriage is to be to-day! Joey has arranged it all. It's his humour, and we dare not thwart him. He is coming here to take you to the wedding. (*In a tremble she draws away from him.*) I haven't been a bad father to you, have I, my girl? When we were waiting for you before you were born, your mother and I, we used to wonder what you would be like, and I—it was natural, for I was always an ambitious man—I hoped you would be a clown. But that wasn't to be, and when the doctor came to me—I was walking up and down this room in a tremble, for my darling was always delicate—when the doctor came to me and said, 'I congratulate you, sir, on being the father of a fine little columbine,' I never uttered one word of reproach to him or to you or to her. (*There is a certain grandeur about the old man as he calls attention to the nobility of his conduct, but it falls from him on the approach of the* CLOWN. *We hear Joey before we see him: he is singing a snatch of one of his triumphant ditties, less for his own pleasure perhaps than to warn the policeman to be on the alert. He has probably driven to the end of the street, and then walked. A tremor runs through* COLUMBINE *at sound of him, but* PANTALOON *smiles, a foolish ecstatic smile. Joey has always been his*

hero.) Be ready to laugh, my girl. Joey will be angry if he doesn't get the laugh.

(*The* CLOWN *struts in, as confident of welcome as if he were the announcement of dinner. He wears his motley like an order. A silk hat and an eyeglass indicate his superior social position. A sausage protruding from a pocket shows that he can unbend at times. A masterful man when you don't applaud enough, he is at present in uproarious spirits as if he had just looked in a mirror. At first he affects not to see his host, to* PANTALOON'S *great entertainment.*)

CLOWN. Miaw, miaw!

PANTALOON (*bent with merriment*). He is at his funniest, quite at his funniest.

(CLOWN *kicks him hard but good-naturedly, and* PANTALOON *falls to the ground.*)

CLOWN. Miaw!

PANTALOON (*reverently*). What an artist!

CLOWN (*pretends to see* COLUMBINE *for the first time in his life. In a masterpiece of funniness he starts back, like one dazzled by a naked light*). Oh, Jiminy Crinkles! Oh, I say, what a beauty!

PANTALOON. There's nobody like him.

CLOWN. It's Fairy. It's my little Fairy.

(*Strange, but all her admiration for this man has gone. He represents nothing to her now but wealth and social rank. He ogles her, and she*

shrinks from him as if he were something nauseous.)

PANTALOON (*warningly*). Fairy!

CLOWN (*showing sharp teeth*). Hey, what's this, old 'un? Don't she admire me?

PANTALOON. Not admire you, Joey? That's a good 'un. Joey's at his best to-day.

CLOWN. Ain't she ready to come to her wedding?

PANTALOON. She's ready, Joey.

CLOWN (*producing a cane, and lowering*). Have you told her what will happen to you if she ain't ready?

PANTALOON (*backing*). I've told her, Joey. (*Supplicating*) Get your hat, Fairy.

CLOWN. Why ain't she dancing wi' joy and pride?

PANTALOON. She is, Joey, she is.

(COLUMBINE *attempts to dance with joy and pride, and the* CLOWN *has been so long used to adulation that he is deceived.*)

CLOWN (*amiable again*). Parson's waiting. Oh, what a lark!

PANTALOON (*with a feeling that lark is not perhaps the happiest word for the occasion*). Get your things, Fairy.

CLOWN (*riding on a chair*). Give me something first, my lovey-dovey. I shuts my eyes and opens my mouth, and waits for what's my doo. (*She knows*

what he means, and it is sacrilege to her. But her father's arms are extended beseechingly. She gives the now abhorred countenance a kiss, and runs from the room. The CLOWN *plays with the kiss as if it were a sausage, a sight abhorrent to* HARLEQUIN, *who has stolen in by the window. Fain would he strike, but though he is wearing his mask, which is a sign that he is invisible, he fears to do so. As if conscious of the unseen presence, the* CLOWN'S *brow darkens.*) Joey, when I came in I saw Boy hanging around outside.

PANTALOON (*ill at ease*). Boy? What can he be wanting?

CLOWN. I know what he is wanting, and I know what he will get. (*He brandishes the cane threateningly. At the same moment the wedding bells begin to peal.*)

PANTALOON. Hark!

CLOWN (*with grotesque accompaniment*). My wedding bells. Fairy's wedding bells. There they go again, here we are again, there they go again, here we are again. (COLUMBINE *returns. She has tried to hide the tears on her cheeks behind a muslin veil. There is a melancholy bouquet in her hand. She passionately desires to be like the respectable public on her marriage day.* HARLEQUIN *raises his mask for a moment that she may see him, and they look long at each other, those two, who are never to have anything lovely to look at again. 'Won't he save her yet?' says*

her face, but 'I am afraid' says his. Still the bells are jangling.)

PANTALOON. My girl.

CLOWN. Mine. (*He kisses her, but it is the sausage look that is in his eyes.* PANTALOON, *bleeding for his girl, raises his staff to strike him, but* COLUMBINE *will not have the sacrifice. She gives her arm to the* CLOWN.) To the wedding. To the wedding. Old 'un, lead on, and we will follow thee! Oh, what a lark!

(*They are going toward the door, but in this supreme moment love turns timid Boy into a man. He waves his mysterious wand over them, so that all three are suddenly bereft of movement. They are like frozen figures. He removes his mask and smiles at them with a terrible face. Fondly and leisurely he gathers* COLUMBINE *in his arms and carries her out by the window. The* CLOWN *and* PANTALOON *remain there, as if struck in the act of taking a step forward. The weding bells are still pealing.*

The curtain falls for a moment only. It rises on the same room several years later.

The same room; as one may say of a suit of clothes, out of which the whilom tenant has long departed, that they are the same man. A room cold to the touch, dilapidated, fragments of the

ceiling fallen and left where they fell, wall-paper peeling damply, portraits of PANTALOON *taken down to sell, unsaleable, and never rehung. Once such a clean room that its ghost to-day might be* COLUMBINE *chasing a speck of dust, it is now untended. Even the windows are grimy, which tells a tale of* PANTALOON'S *final capitulation; while any heart was left him we may be sure he kept the windows clean so that the policeman might spy upon him. Perhaps the policeman has gone from the street, bored, nothing doing there now.*

It is evening and winter time, and the ancient man is moving listlessly about his room, mechanically blowing life into his hands as if he had forgotten that there is no real reason why there should be life in them. The clothes COLUMBINE *used to brush with such care are slovenly, the hair she so often smoothed with all her love is unkempt. He is smaller, a man who has shrunk into himself in shame, not so much shame that he is uncared for as that he is forgotten.*

He is sitting forlorn by the fire when the door opens to admit his first visitor for years. It is the CLOWN, *just sufficiently stouter to look more resplendent. The drum, so to say, is larger. He gloats over the bowed* PANTALOON *like a spiteful boy.)*

CLOWN (*poking* PANTALOON *with his cane*). Who can this miserable ancient man be?

(*Visited at last by some one who knows him,* PANTALOON *rises in a surge of joy.*)

PANTALOON. You have come back, Joey, after all these years!

CLOWN. Hands off. I came here, my good fellow, to inquire for a Mr. Joseph.

PANTALOON (*shuddering*). Yes, that's me; that's all that's left of me; Mr. Joseph! Me that used to be Joey.

CLOWN. I think I knew you once, Mr. Joseph?

PANTALOON. Joey, you're hard on me. It wasn't my fault that Boy tricked us and ran off wi' her.

CLOWN. May I ask, Mr. Joseph, were you ever on the boards?

PANTALOON. This to me as was your right hand!

CLOWN. I seem to call to mind something like you as used to play the swell.

PANTALOON (*fiercely*). It's a lie! I was born a Pantaloon, and a Pantaloon I'll die.

CLOWN. Yes, I heard you was dead, Mr. Joseph. Everybody knows it except yourself. (*He gnaws a sausage.*)

PANTALOON (*greedily*). Gie me a bite, Joey.

CLOWN (*relentless*). I only bites with the profession. I never bites with the public.

PANTALOON. What brought you here? Just to rub it in?

CLOWN. Let's say I came to make inquiries after the happy pair.

PANTALOON. It's years and years, Joey, since they ran away, and I've never seen them since.

CLOWN. Heard of them?

PANTALOON. Yes, I've heard. They're in distant parts.

CLOWN. Answer their letters?

PANTALOON (*darkening*). No.

CLOWN. They will be doing well, Mr. Joseph, without me?

PANTALOON (*boastfully*). At first they did badly, but when the managers heard Fairy was my daughter they said the daughter o' such a famous old 'un was sure to draw by reason of her father's name. And they print the name of her father in big letters.

CLOWN (*rapping it out*). It's you that lie now. I know about them. They go starving like vagabonds from town to town.

PANTALOON. Ay, it's true. They write that they're starving.

CLOWN. And they've got a kid to add to their misery. All vagabonds, father, mother, and kid.

PANTALOON. Rub it in, Joey.

CLOWN. You looks as if you would soon be starving too.

PANTALOON (*not without dignity*). I'm pinched.

CLOWN. Well, well, I'm a kindly soul, and what brought me here was to make you an offer.

PANTALOON (*glistening*). A shop?

CLOWN. For old times' sake.

PANTALOON (*with indecent eagerness*). To be old un' again?

CLOWN. No, you crock, but to carry a sandwich-board in the street wi' my new old 'un's name on it.

(PANTALOON *raises his withered arm, but he lets it fall.*)

PANTALOON. May you be forgiven for that, Joey.

CLOWN. Miaw!

PANTALOON (*who is near his end*). Joey, there stands humbled before you an old artist.

CLOWN. Never an artist?

PANTALOON (*firmly*). An artist—at present disengaged.

CLOWN. Forgotten—clean forgotten.

PANTALOON (*bowing his head*). Yes, that's it—forgotten. Once famous—now forgotten. Joey, they don't know me even at the sausage-shop. I am just one of the public. My worst time is when we should be going on the stage, and I think I hear the gallery boys calling for the old 'un—'Bravo, old 'un!' Then I sort of break up. I sleep bad o' nights. I think sleep would come to me if I could rub my back on the

scenery again. (*He shudders.*) But the days are longer than the nights. I allus see how I am to get through to-day, but I sit thinking and thinking how I am to get through to-morrow.

CLOWN. Poor old crock! Well, so long.

PANTALOON (*offering him the poker*). Joey, gie me one rub before you go—for old times' sake.

CLOWN. You'll never be rubbed by a clown again, Mr. Joseph.

PANTALOON. Call me Joey once—say 'Good-bye, old 'un'—for old times' sake.

CLOWN. You will never be called Joey or old 'un by a clown again, Mr. Joseph.

(*With a noble gesture* PANTALOON *bids him begone and the* CLOWN *miaws and goes, twisting a sausage in his mouth as if it were a cigar. So he passes from our sight, funny to the last, or never funny, an equally tragic figure.*

PANTALOON *rummages in the wicker basket among his gods and strokes them lovingly, a painted goose, his famous staff, a bladder on a stick. He does not know that he is hugging the bladder to his cold breast as he again crouches by the fire.*

The door opens, and COLUMBINE *and* HARLEQUIN *peep in, prepared to receive a blow for welcome. Their faces are hollow and their clothes in rags, and, saddest of all, they cannot*

dance in. They walk in like the weary public. COLUMBINE *looks as if she could walk as far as her father's feet, but never any farther. With them is the child. This is the great surprise:* HE IS A CLOWN. *They sign to the child to intercede for them, but though only a baby, he is a clown, and he must do it in his own way. He pats his nose, grins deliciously with the wrong parts of his face, and dives beneath the table.* PANTALOON *looks round and sees his daughter on her knees before him.*)

PANTALOON. You! Fairy! Come back! (*For a moment he is to draw her to him, then he remembers.*) No, I'll have none of you. It was you as brought me to this. Begone, I say begone. (*They are backing meekly to the door.*) Stop a minute. Little Fairy, is it true—is it true my Fairy has a kid? (*She nods, with glistening eyes that say 'Can you put me out now?' The baby peers from under the table, and rubs* PANTALOON'S *legs with the poker. Poor little baby, he is the last of the clowns, and knows not what is in store for him.* PANTALOON *trembles, it is so long since he has been rubbed. He dare not look down.*) Fairy, is it the kid? (*She nods again; the moment has come.*) My Fairy's kid! (*Somehow he has always taken for granted that his grandchild is merely a columbine. If the child had been something greater they would all have got a*

shop again and served under him.) Oh, Fairy, if only he had been a clown!

(*Now you see how it is going. The babe emerges, and he is a clown.*

Just for a moment PANTALOON *cries. Then the babe is tantalising him with a sausage.* PANTALOON *revolves round him like a happy teetotum. Who so gay now as* COLUMBINE *and* HARLEQUIN, *dancing merrily as if it were again the morning? Oh, what a lark is life! Ring down the curtain quickly, Mr. Prompter, before we see them all swept into the dust-heap.*)

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